Spiral REFRAME

2024

THE RUBIN

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Editorial Director:
Sarah Zabrodski

Creative Director:
KJ Bowen

Design Assistant:
Isobel Chiang

About the Cover
This artwork is a detail from Prithvi Shrestha's painting *Attachment*, which is featured in the Rubin Museum's exhibition *Reimagine: Himalayan Art Now*. About this artwork, the artist wrote, "We are interrelated to art and culture, we are connected to different traditions, and we are also associated with science and technology. The faith in myth is still alive in our society. This is what I am trying to show in my work. I do believe in the power of love and affection, so I have tried to show the pure unseen power of togetherness and attachment."

About the Cover Artist
Prithvi Shrestha is a visual artist from Nepal whose work has been featured in five solo shows and several group exhibitions. His awards include the World Bank South Asia Region and World Bank Art Program USA, Araniko Youth Award, and Himalayan Light Art Scholarship. He is the founder of Bindu, a space for artists, in Lalitpur, Nepal, and has coordinated many national and international art events.

Prithvi Shrestha (b. 1977, Lalitpur, Nepal; lives and works in Lalitpur, Nepal); *Attachment*; 2018; acrylic on canvas; courtesy of the artist

RE THE PEOPLE

What would it take to reimagine the world we live in, the experiences and stories we share? Many of us have come through the last few years with new ideas questioning beliefs and identities that no longer serve us. The current issue of *Spiral* is titled **Reframe** and inspired by Buddhist thinking and ideas on non-attachment. Its four sections—release, reframe, reimagine, and realize—take you on journeys into stories of perspective shifting and radical transformation.

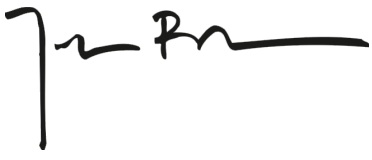
2024 marks the twentieth anniversary of the Rubin Museum, an important milestone as we glance behind to see how far we've come and look ahead to the opportunities and challenges of a cultural institution in a changed world. Is it time for a rethink? For us that means boldly letting go of an old model and redefining what it means to be a museum in the twenty-first century. This fall, as part of our evolution, we will close our physical galleries on 17th Street and transition into a "museum without walls," with the goal of bringing greater awareness and understanding of Himalayan art to more people around the world. To that end we have been building a portfolio of global projects and digital outreach.

Our traveling Mandala Lab, currently in Europe and installed in outdoor public spaces, offers visitors a chance to experience the power of a hands-on journey towards self-knowledge. Our recently launched Project Himalayan Art—an interdisciplinary resource for learning about Himalayan, Tibetan, and Inner Asian art and culture—includes a robust digital platform, a publication, and a traveling exhibition to colleges across the United States.

Bringing art to people in diverse ways is what founders Shelley and Donald Rubin did through traveling exhibitions before they even opened a museum. Continuing that thread, we're launching a long-term loan program to have Himalayan art better represented in public collections across the country. We're also inaugurating a grant program to support artists and creatives who work in and around Himalayan art, and are awarding a Rubin Museum Himalayan Art Prize annually.

Onsite at the Museum is the final exhibition presented in our 17th Street building and our largest-ever contemporary show, *Reimagine: Himalayan Art Now*. It features thirty-two artists with their works in juxtaposition with collection objects. Stay tuned this fall for a launch of fresh content as part of *Spiral* online, including interviews, writing, art, and audio from artists featured in *Reimagine*. And to learn more about the future of the Rubin visit rubinmuseum.org/transformation.

In the spirit of bringing art to places near and far, please enjoy this copy of *Spiral*, with its special wraparound cover, on your subway ride home, your trip across the country or overseas. Share it with friends. Open it up and join us in rethinking, reframing, and reimagining.



Jorrit Britschgi
Executive Director
Rubin Museum of Art

IMAGINE (a.k.a. Sneha Shrestha) is a Nepali artist who incorporates her native language and the aesthetics of Sanskrit scriptures into her work. Her art has been featured in several exhibitions, and her public walls appear across the world from Kathmandu to Boston. The Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, recently acquired her painting *Home416*, making her the first contemporary Nepali artist to be part of the museum's collection. Sneha received her master's from Harvard University. She created the illustrations for this issue's Reframe series.

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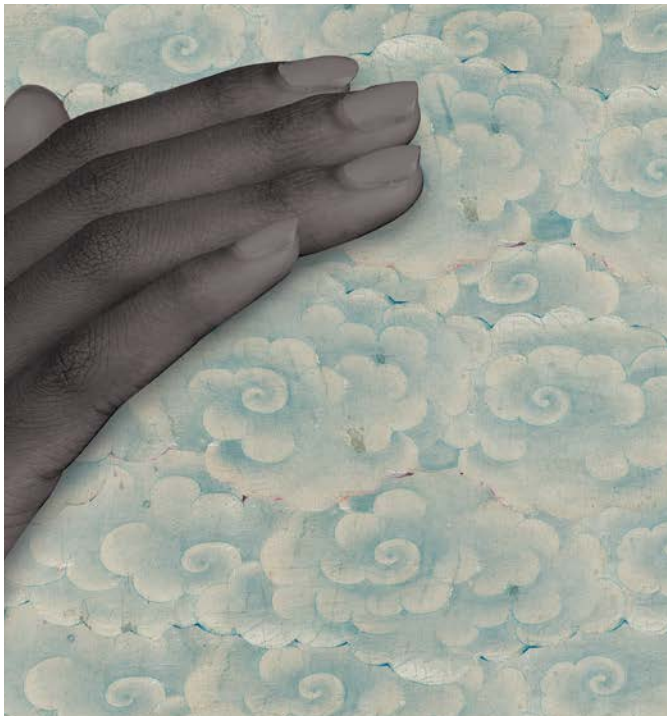

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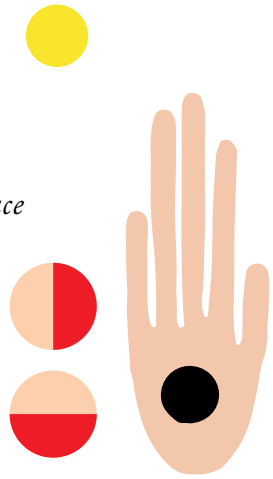

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REFRAME

Personal stories about radical shifts in perspective

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Howard Kaplan is an editor and writer who helped found *Spiral* magazine in 2017. He currently works at the Smithsonian and divides his time between Washington, DC, and New York City.

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READ ONLINE AT RUBINMUSEUM.ORG/SPIRAL

FREEDOM FROM THE STORY

The Buddhist concept of non-attachment conveys a transformative reorientation

BY *Annabella Pitkin*

FOR MANY PEOPLE, THE BUDDHIST CONCEPT OF non-attachment might initially seem perplexing, or even off-putting. The English term "non-attachment" can give the misleading impression that we should not enjoy anything, or worse, that we are supposed to cultivate indifference or disconnection. But for Buddhists, non-attachment actually conveys the opposite: a transformative reorientation of ourselves and our relationships, an opening up to love and compassion without limit. Indeed, according to Buddhist thinkers past and present, without understanding and practicing non-attachment, we are unable to experience the true enjoyment and connection that we long for. Ultimately, non-attachment in the Buddhist sense reveals the joyful freedom of knowing reality as it really is.

To understand why Buddhists describe non-attachment as an essential and liberating practice, it can be helpful to start with non-attachment's inverse: the ordinary, addictive way we habitually go about our lives. Think about the moment you wake up each day: Do you stretch? Wish for more sleep? Gulp coffee or tea? Maybe you think about what you'll do at work or how you hope to see this person, avoid that one, receive a compliment, avoid criticism. Whatever our daily routine, we all have the habit of reaching for experiences we like and pushing away those that we don't. We are continually hoping for more of this, less of that, in a constant stream of mental activity that a famous Chan Buddhist text calls "picking and choosing."

Buddhist writers and teachers across the centuries have had a lot to say about the inner process of this picking and choosing. According to Buddhist sources, we ordinarily operate in the endless grip of attachment, understood as a core aspect of how we—and all living beings—relate to our lives. (The English word "attachment" can translate a range of Buddhist terms related to grasping, craving, and desire, such as *taṇhā*, *lobha*, and *rāga* in Sanskrit and Pāli, and *chags pa*, *'dod chags*, and *'dod pa* in Tibetan.) Buddhist writers point out that we often think if we could just arrange circumstances to our liking, we would be happy, safe, and problem-free. But the push-pull of our grasping mind continually fails to deliver. Indeed, the relentless grind of attachment and its inseparable twin, aversion, are fundamental aspects of what the Buddha Shakyamuni described as *dukkha*, the suffering or "dis-ease" that pervades all our ordinary perceptions and experiences.

The nineteenth-century eastern Tibetan Buddhist master Dza Paltrul Rinpoche famously compared our attachment-oriented pursuit of pleasure to licking honey off a knife. We taste sweet honey, but at the exact same moment, the blade slices our tongue. Although we think our attachments will bring us what we want, our attachment contaminates every pleasure with a wound. And the problems with attachment don't stop with how we hurt or disappoint ourselves. Buddhist teachers say that attachment distorts all our relationships, ironically leading us to subtly center ourselves even when we most wish to be present with others. Attachment gives rise to poisonous emotions like greed, hatred, and jealousy, and compromises our availability for ethical and loving relationships.

As described by Buddhist teachers like Paltrul Rinpoche, our attachment to our own preferences and storylines ultimately reveals a still-deeper form of grasping—the clutching at self-identity that fuels all our suffering. This subtle attachment to self-identity is tied to our ignorance, or more accurately, our miscognition of reality, the miscognition that Buddhists identify as the root "poison" standing between us and enlightenment. Our miscognition is to think we exist as a separate and unchanging self, and then we grab tightly onto the private, isolated self that we think we are. Yet in actuality, as Buddhist thinkers like Paltrul explain, this presumed egocentric self is not how we exist at all. In reality, we

OF THE SELF

are interdependent with all things in an infinitely dynamic relational web of mutual connection and transformation.

At the most basic level then, Buddhist ideas and practices of non-attachment are about freeing ourselves from the grasping states of mind that reduce all relations and events to the ego, trapping us in the closed circle of me and mine, and binding us in a deluded relation to the world. All Buddhist practices of non-attachment turn out to be on some level about making a shift in our awareness: giving ourselves the gift of freedom from our stories about ourselves.

Buddhist techniques for cultivating non-attachment include many methods for working with the body, with social life and relationships, and with the mind and emotions in meditation, ritual, and devotional practice. Bodily and social techniques for developing non-attachment can include a range of renunciant lifestyles and many kinds of vows, including the five vows of lay practitioners and the more detailed vows of monks and nuns. Many traditional ways of teaching and practicing non-attachment begin with material and bodily forms of renunciation and build on these as a foundation for developing a deeper non-attachment to underlying conceptions of self.

The beloved Tibetan saint Milarepa exemplifies multiple layers of cultivating non-attachment, from his practicing renunciation in mountain caves and relinquishing conventional social status to his meditations on the true nature of mind and reality. There are many more recent examples as well, like the twentieth-century Himalayan renunciant and scholar Khunu Lama Tenzin Gyaltsen, whose writings on non-attachment and *bodhicitta* are often taught by His Holiness the Dalai Lama, and Yongey Mingyur Rinpoche, who has written about cultivating non-attachment during his four-and-a-half-year wandering, homeless retreat.

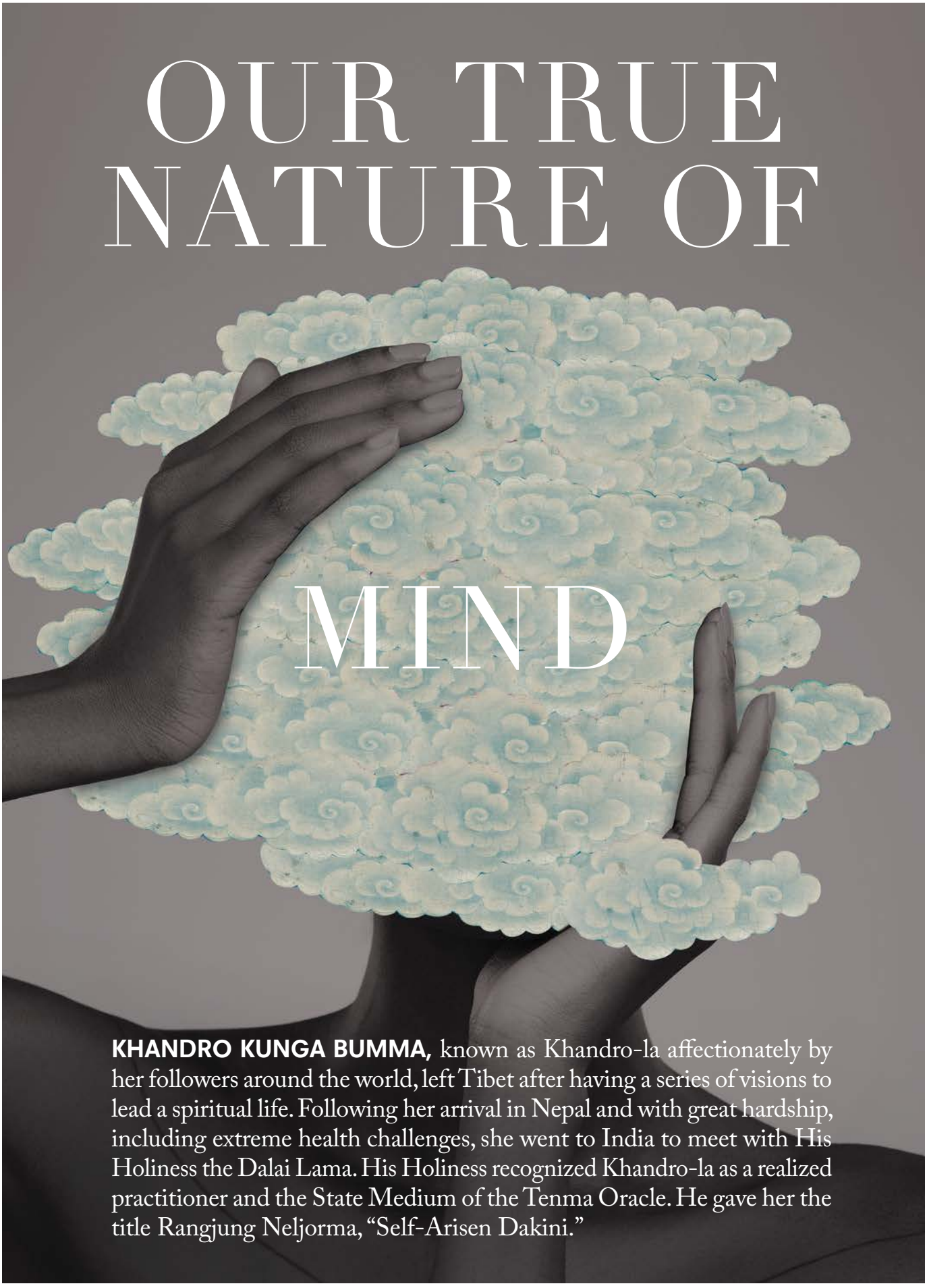
The practice of non-attachment can take many forms, sometimes intensively communal, sometimes more solitary.

Certain Buddhist sources emphasize the value of structured group practices of non-attachment in keeping people honest, preventing individual meditators from becoming isolated or deluding themselves about the progress they've made. Yet other Buddhist sources advise practitioners to give up attachment even to monastic robes, institutional roles, or the very idea of being a "Buddhist," because all of these can involve grasping at a certain story of the self. Ultimately, Buddhist teachers emphasize that an inner attitude of non-attachment is what truly matters, both for achieving liberation from the egocentric self and for compassionately relieving the suffering of others.

Annabella Pitkin is associate professor of Buddhism and East Asian religions at Lehigh University. Her research focuses on Tibetan Buddhist modernity, Buddhist ideals of renunciation, miracle narratives, and Buddhist biographies. She received her BA from Harvard and PhD in religion from Columbia. She is the author of *Renunciation and Longing: The Life of a Twentieth-Century Himalayan Buddhist Saint*, which explores themes of non-attachment and teacher-student relationship in the life of Khunu Lama Tenzin Gyaltsen.

Milarepa; Tibet; 18th century; stone; Rubin Museum of Art; gift of the Shelley & Donald Rubin Foundation; F1997.52.4 (HAR 700037)

OUR TRUE NATURE OF MIND



KHANDRO KUNGA BUMMA, known as Khandro-la affectionately by her followers around the world, left Tibet after having a series of visions to lead a spiritual life. Following her arrival in Nepal and with great hardship, including extreme health challenges, she went to India to meet with His Holiness the Dalai Lama. His Holiness recognized Khandro-la as a realized practitioner and the State Medium of the Tenma Oracle. He gave her the title Rangjung Neljorma, "Self-Arisen Dakini."

Harnessing the wisdom of emptiness to generate compassion

Khandro-la

INTERVIEWED AND
TRANSLATED FROM TIBETAN BY

Tenzin Gelek

Tenzin Gelek: How do you describe non-attachment?

Khandro-la: In Buddhist teaching, when we refer to attachment, we are talking about an affliction that obscures our mind. Our mind is obscured by ignorance, the misconception about how things exist and the belief that things exist independently without any causes and conditions. This wrong view propels attachment and other afflictions. We believe that attachment, by nature, is incidental, temporary, and interdependent. When we separate it from our mind with proper application of causes and conditions such as wisdom and methods, we can remove attachment from our mind, and we can achieve a state of non-attachment. Therefore, sometimes we use the term non-attachment as a means to describe our true nature of mind, which is devoid of attachment and other afflictions. Our true nature of mind is clear, illuminating, and empty.

Is non-attachment the same as detachment?

Non-attachment can be used to describe people who realize emptiness directly. When you look at the true nature of mind, it is free of attachment, so it can be both the state of non-attachment and detachment. But when we are in meditative equipoise, single pointedly placing our mind to an object, we do not experience the gross level of attachment. However, our mind is not totally free of attachment as we have not realized emptiness yet.

So to attain a non-attachment state you need to realize emptiness?

Yes. Only when we have realized emptiness are we in the state of non-attachment. In other words, when we have not realized emptiness, we are still under the influence of attachment, although sometimes the attachment is not active.

Is attachment a bad thing? What about being attached to loved ones?

There are different ways to practice our compassion to sentient beings. For example, when people show their compassion to someone who is lacking a means of living or survival, they do so by perceiving that the person exists intrinsically, that is independently without any causes and conditions. Likewise, their compassion, and the practitioner themself, all of these different parts are viewed as though everything has an intrinsic nature. This is what most of us do. This type of perception reinforces our confusion or ignorance and creates further afflictive emotions such as attachment and anger that produce pain.

We can view all sentient beings and their circumstances, our existence and practices, as a product of dependent origination and lacking intrinsic nature—everything we see as labeled by our mind or a projection of our mind. We come to understand that all of these phenomena are interdependent, yet they are fully functioning in conventional reality, so they experience favorable and non-favorable conditions through the workings of dependent origination. This type of view of compassion is proper and considered very powerful.

From this perspective, we see that although everything is lacking intrinsic nature, other sentient beings are still under the influence of the self-grasping mind and ignorance. They hold self as intrinsic, and through this misperception about self, they get attached to it and other things. This propels jealousy, harmful thoughts, perverted views, all sorts of suffering. This leads to conflict among family and nations.

With this understanding we feel compassion and love to sentient beings and wish them to be free of suffering. There is a sort of attachment here, but it is not propelled by ignorance. It is not an attachment that propels suffering. This can be a pure attachment, a sense of virtuous emotion, and it is not an attachment strictly defined in our ordinary sense.

We feel love for our family members, parents, and children. In an ordinary sense, it is a positive feeling. But it is still a form of attachment. These loves formed by seeing things as intrinsic nature become causes for sufferings later.

Can you share an example?

When a couple first gets married, their attachment to each other provides pleasure. However, this pleasure does not exist intrinsically and doesn't last. When you are attached to a person, you don't see the person is composed of flesh, bones, and other substances that are conditional and subject to decay. You don't see the person is under the influence of afflictions such as attachment and anger.

When we get attached to such a person, we see the person as incredibly beautiful, the best, the most precious, and totally solid and permanent. However, when we observe carefully, in reality, we realize that they are constantly changing, subject to impermanence and the conditions and causes that produce suffering. We also realize that this attachment itself is a source of suffering for them and for us.

Our attachment to them provides benefit in the short term, physically and mentally. We later realize that our perception of them is incorrect, and we are holding the wrong view of the person. This is because we confuse the impermanent as

the permanent, the nature of suffering as the happiness, the impure nature as the pure nature, selfless nature as self-nature.

Of course, we need a companion, income, a good reputation—there's nothing wrong with that. However, we must realize that these are produced with causes and conditions, and they lack intrinsic nature.

How can we practice non-attachment to materials and people that are not healthy?

In order to confront this issue, we must realize that we are confused. So we should not look outside but look introspectively, inside our mind. We should examine the true nature of the object of our attachment, the true nature of our mind that gets attached to it. We need to examine what the mind looks like when we feel attached, how this mind grasps things, what is the aim or what does the mind want, what is the result of this attachment. First we ask these questions to ourselves. Then we can focus our examination to the object of our attachment by looking at how we perceive that object or person.

For example, when we don't like someone, rather than trying to change the person, we need to look at our perception, observe and investigate how this dislike feeling is taking shape in our mind. We will realize that, in most cases, this disliking has more to do with ourselves, our ignorance or confused state of our mind, rather than how things exist out there. This method is a good approach for dealing with our attachment to the wrong things. If we don't change our mind or attitude by looking introspectively, we can't change our behavior.

Is compassion a form of attachment?

When we experience compassion, loving kindness, and *bodhicitta*, or awakening mind, we get attachment to sentient beings, such as to our family members. Although it is a form of attachment, there is a difference, depending how you feel the attachment and the causes for such an attachment. Attachment driven by compassion, love, and *bodhicitta* is not strictly affliction. This is because we can experience these feelings such as compassion without the self-grasping mind or seeing them as intrinsic.

Relying on the wisdom of emptiness to dismantle attachment is the most powerful tool.

Is practicing non-attachment a realistic goal?

Yes. When we talk about happiness and suffering, they are not permanent and intrinsic. They are interdependent and relative, so they can be changed and abandoned. Attachment is a form of an ignorant state of our mind; this ignorance is incidental and temporary but not the true nature of our mind. The true nature of our mind is pure, clear, bright, and empty. Attachment and other afflictions are circumstantial and incidental; they are formed through interdependent and relative conditions. To dismantle the attachment, we need to look at the reality of the attachment and how the attachment is formed. If we are able to understand that materials and people do not exist as we perceive them to, then our attachment will fall apart.

In order to dismantle suffering, we need to dismantle attachment. Therefore, relying on the wisdom of emptiness to dismantle attachment is the most powerful tool. Not only does it enable us to root out attachment but it also enables us to generate a powerful compassion and loving-kindness that we can extend to all beings. Through seeing the true nature of all things, seeing that everything is part of dependent origination, we are able to abandon our attachment to a select group of people. We see every being as the same in their basic nature and conditions, thus enabling us to see and extend our compassion and loving-kindness to all.

How can we practice non-attachment in daily life?

First we need to see the negative results of attachment. Then there are many approaches we can use to abandon attachment, including understanding the true nature of attachment—that everything lacks intrinsic nature and that attachment itself is impermanent and interdependent. Then there are practical means to reduce attachment, including being aware of thoughts that reinforce it.

How can we be goal oriented while practicing non-attachment?

When we think about our goals, we need to understand that we do not want suffering and our ultimate goal is happiness. Likewise, all other sentient beings wish for the same thing. So our intention or motivation should not be only focused on oneself but for all sentient beings, as we are all connected.

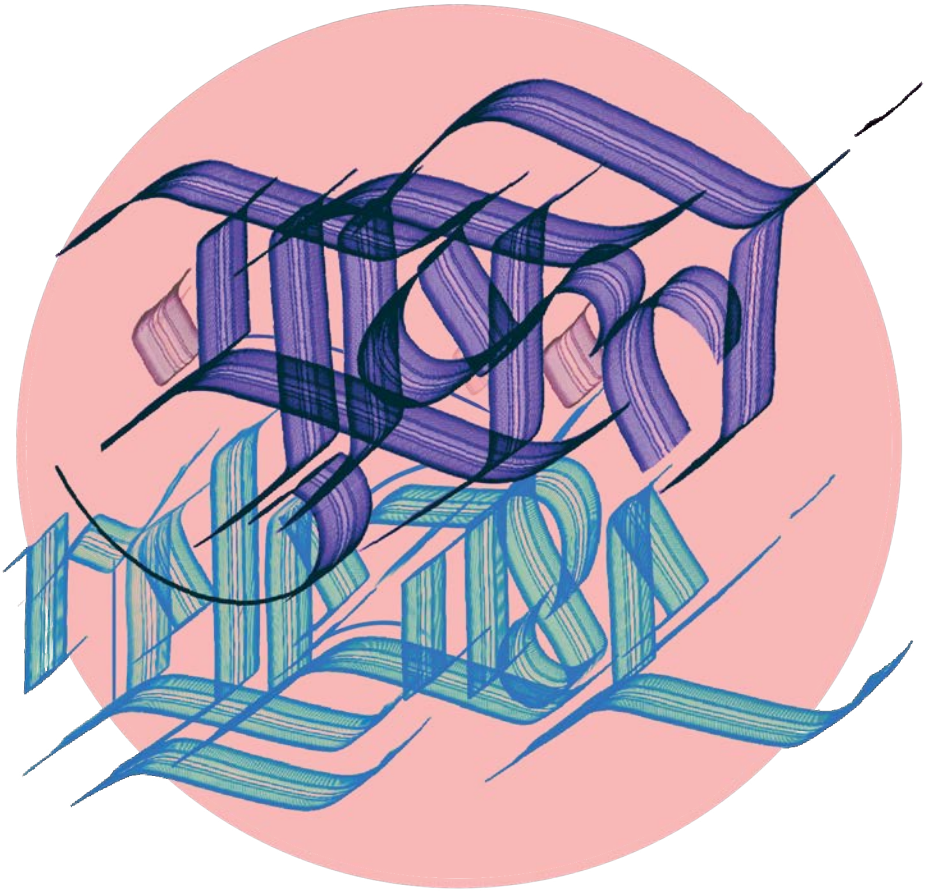
Since all phenomena are relative and dependent on each other, we know that they are not absolute and inherent. If we follow such a view, then practicing the Buddhist Dharma and doing business are not two separate things. The clearer we see the workings of interdependence and interconnection the less conflict we see between achieving goals and practicing non-attachment. When we are not attached and have a pure intention, it helps open our hearts to accomplish many things.

Read an extended version of this interview at rubinmuseum.org/spiral

Khandro-la teaches around the world and is a sought-after speaker for her wisdom and compassion. Her teachings focus on generating *bodhicitta*, the awakened mind, and the wisdom of emptiness. She also serves as an advisor to numerous Buddhist teachers and their Dharma centers globally.

Tenzin Gelek is senior specialist, Himalayan arts and culture, at the Rubin Museum of Art.

RELEASE



by Howard Kaplan

Chime Lama was raised in a Tibetan Buddhist household on a mountaintop in Woodstock, New York, where her father, the Third Bardor Rinpoche and a holder of the lineage of Terchen Barway Dorje (1836–1920), helped establish the Karma Triyana Dharmachakra Buddhist center in the 1970s. Rinpoche taught the Dharma, or Buddhist teachings, all over the world. While growing up, Chime assumed she would follow in his footsteps, perhaps even become a Buddhist nun or a yogini and devote her life to spiritual practice. Her path seemed preordained, and she went on to receive her undergraduate and graduate degrees in Buddhist and Tibetan studies, with the intention of applying those skills in a Dharmic context. "Looking back, I think I may have been too rigid in my idea of the type of life I should lead. Much of this had to do with my fear of embarrassing my family. I feared that if I pursued music or acting, for example, others might say, 'Why is she doing that? Why doesn't she serve her father's center?' These thoughts put stress on me and prevented me from feeling free."

Chime was also a budding poet and songwriter, but to pursue her creativity she had to release her old way of thinking. She moved away from her father's Buddhist center and created a new life in Brooklyn, where she enrolled in an MFA program in poetry. She also moved in with her partner, which meant acknowledging publicly and privately that she was in a committed relationship. "Being that Tibetans are culturally conservative regarding romantic relationships, it did not feel comfortable to make my relationship public, but there was no avoiding it since we would be living together."

Moving away from Woodstock also meant moving away from what Chime calls her "childlike notions of what a 'good' Buddhist life 'should' look like." She had to release attachments to thoughts that were not serving her anymore to make room for a new life. "Moving in with my partner was the first step towards forming a family. We now share a beautiful daughter who we love and adore. I realize that none of this is in opposition with the Dharma. I can be myself and be a good Buddhist."

Chime attributes many of her struggles to her own misunderstandings, unreasonable expectations, and false restrictions. In fact, she came to understand that the Dharma is adaptable and does not have to appear in any one way. "In truth, I believe part of my struggle has been as basic as allowing myself to be happy. Whether due to aging, experience, or fatigue, I'm now more accepting of the proverbial pat on the back, telling myself, it's okay to be me."

Chime Lama is a writer, translator, and multi-genre artist. She has served as the co-editor-in-chief of the *Brooklyn Review* and the poetry editor of *Yeshe Journal*. Her poetry collection, *Sphinxlike*, is forthcoming from Finishing Line Press.

MELTDOWN SAMSARA

An artist faces a frightening part of herself and learns how to let go

BY

Yangdzom Lama

I NEARLY MISSED BEING DIAGNOSED on the autism spectrum. It was only when my mother and I spoke about my meltdowns that the psychologists assessing me changed their minds. At that point I didn't really know what a meltdown was, even though I had experienced them. I just knew they made me feel ashamed, like I was a bad person, someone incapable of maintaining control over their behavior.

One time, my university housemate shouted at me and waved her keys in my face after I rushed to open the front door for her. The loud jangling baffled me. I proceeded to smash empty beer bottles onto the kitchen floor; it was the only way I could express the overwhelming feeling of being unable to fix a problem. We had been going through a long process of falling out. But I couldn't let go and so uncontrollable energy boiled to the surface and was released explosively.

After every meltdown, that energy—uncomfortably coursing through my veins—would die down eventually. Then exhaustion and shame would creep in. Following that particular meltdown in university, I hid myself away and cried, wondering what was wrong with me. It was scary to experience, and it must have been scary for others to witness.

Lots of things cause autistic meltdowns: a change in routine, sensory overload, social challenges, etc. In the past, I shouted and cried, screamed and roared. I hurt myself physically. I hit or kicked or lashed out at those I loved the most.

After my diagnosis, my mother and I worked on learning my triggers. From there, we realized that walking away was the key to preventing intense reactions to difficult moments. Instead of clinging on to a situation to try to fix it immediately, I began more and more to just *wait*. I could always come back later when calmer, more lucid.

When I sat down to paint *Meltdown Samsara*, I was nervous, but I knew that allowing myself to be vulnerable and represent a frightening side of myself would help me understand and avoid meltdowns. Painting teaches you how to let go. When I illustrate a pain I have experienced, I remove it from a dark place within me, bringing it out into the world in an array of bright colors and symbols.

Meltdown Samsara is a deeply personal piece, and my own likeness appears twice. The blue figure inside the circle is a representation of self-destruction and what happens when one clings to the desperate need to fix their surroundings. Bottles of wine, their liquid spilling all over, are a reckless remedy for the meltdown she is experiencing. She holds a hammer, hoping to both mend and destroy her situation, and she runs and runs, believing that escapism is what will help her let go.

As seen in paintings of the Wheel of Life, traditional depictions of samsara—a Sanskrit word denoting the endless cycle of birth, death, and rebirth—often feature a fierce being that represents impermanence. In my version, that being is a red, Yangdzom-like demon. It is my own self who holds the circle and keeps me trapped in overwhelming, negative thought patterns. This is not me trying to demonize myself. In fact, this honest expression of a part of my being is a form of self-forgiveness. Similar to how the frightening depictions of Yama—the Lord of Death—are simply an honest expression of a part of life.

I don't have as many meltdowns these days. A combination of painting, gardening, and regular acupuncture treatments have helped. Meltdowns are not completely eradicated from my life though—after all, I'm still in samsara. I had a meltdown last winter, when things became too stressful. But it was different from previous ones. I didn't hurt myself; I didn't lash out. My boyfriend was with me, and eventually he was able to help me into bed.

I remember the feeling that I just needed to wail out loud, to vocally grieve. I let myself; I surrendered to the fact that there was energy that needed to be released. I knew that I had to let go and wait for the storm to pass.

As another act of letting go, this painting is dedicated to my brother, who has been affected by my meltdowns and is one of the people I love the most.

See the artist's work in the exhibition *Reimagine: Himalayan Art Now* on view at the Rubin Museum from March 15 to October 6, 2024.

Yangdzom Lama is a London-based artist whose work consists of paintings, embroideries, prints, and ceramics that often incorporate creatures and nature in the form of animal-headed people and deities. She is influenced by Tibetan Buddhist art and symbolism thanks to her Yolmo heritage, a Tibetan ethnic group that has lived in Nepal for generations. In 2017, Yangdzom was diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder (ASD), which has helped her in embracing herself not only as an artist but as a human being.

Yangdzom Lama (b. 1997, London, England; lives and works in London, England); *Meltdown Samsara*; 2022; oil paint on wood; courtesy of the artist

Wheel of Life; Tibet; early 20th century; pigments on cloth; Rubin Museum of Art; C2004.21.1 (HAR 65356)

ILLUSTRATION BY RITHIKA MERCHANT

Of Seeds And Blood

Reemergence through loving the world

BY *Yuria Celidwen*

K'A'TESHIL K'INAL[1]

Sna'elsba sk'aal te ik'e ja' sna'el te ak'ope.
Ya sna' te pasbilat ta k'ayo sok ta sch'ejan k'inal,
jich te lekil k'ope ja' spoxil,
te sbolilal k'inal sok kontrailetik.

Sna'elsba sk'aal te ja'e ja' sna'elaba.
Ay ta na'el te pasbilat ta xab sok ta syujk'ab te ja'e.
K'aal ajk'ubal ya xmalik beel,
ta bajk'el tajimal.

Sna'elsba sk'aal te k'ajk'e ja' sna'elsba snopbenal ajol.
Ya sna' te pasbilat ta xojob sok ek'etike.
Ta axinal te waichiletike,
ya yak'ik unin snich sk'alel uetik.

Sna'elsba sk'aal te lum k'inale ja' sna'elsba te awo'tane.
Sna'o te pasbilat ta ts'unubiletik sok ta ch'ich'.
Ta banti sjaltiklayesba awisim ya xmal te sbujts' k'inale,
yak'be yip te kuxlejale, kuxul te k'anbaile . . .

FERTILE GROUND

To know the Sun of Wind is to know your word.
Know you are made of songs and silence,
the kindest word is where the healing comes
from tempests and from foes.

To know the Sun of Water is to know your form.
Know you are made of abyss and waves,
day and night they flow and go
in constant restless games.

To know the Sun of Fire is to know your mind.
Know you are made of light and stars
that in the shadows dreams
give tender moonlight gleams.

To know the Sun of Earth is to know your heart.
Know you are made of seeds and blood
within your web of roots bliss flows
to nourish life, to live in love . . .

[1] *Poem in Maya Tseltal and its translation into English by Yuria Celidwen.*

This will be a familiar story.

It will be a story of blame, shame, self-loathing, and condemnation of "the other" that morphs into remembrance, resilience, reverence, and love.

~*~

Once upon the greenery of my years, panic held me in his grip of uncertainty. I was barely hanging from the horns of the moon with no safety net underneath. Mere existence hurt in beauty and dismay, bliss and horror. Not unlike today.

Stories run fast about a world that is inert, dreamless, merely for stock . . .

Domination bolsters loss—subjugation furthers bondage.

These tales of alienation and division, conquest and defeat, they paralyze us. Unable to act, we become sterile, fearing our creativity due to our destructive power over the world.

What wicked influence convinced us
of guarding an inner cell
against our dreams?

Roaming in the maze of powerlessness, unable to belong, I had little of the sweetness of youth and was heavy in the bitter taste. I was too young for wisdom, and already too exhausted from fighting for my life. Between recklessness and hopelessness, I dared the world to counter back.

Time felt rock rigid then.
Lithic.
Inescapable
from my own rigidity of unattainable control.

But uncertainty is freedom.

I imagined humanity carrying a heart of stone. Then, I realized Elder rocks are made of tiny sibling particles—slowly, slowly packed together. While they may seem as if weighed down by time, most often buried, silent, and left for dead, they are still porous. Channels between the Siblings run, through which water and wind flow. There is a song resounding in their heart.

Their hearts are full of reverence, their wisdom full of Spirit from the Lands.

And so, this was their song:

Dear One, we know very well the mud you're in. Know its breadth.
Surrender. Still. In its depth lies the acorn's dream of groves.
Your story, while it seems your own, is always woven with others.
Now, a thread looking for warp and weft; later,
a web of food shared, a good home to all others.

Theirs is a gift of trust, a gift of commitment. These words are water that does not resist but coheres. These words bridge time, the past into the future, spiraling into this present moment when you read them. These are the stories of my Elders that return sowing seeds of reverence, of home, of love. It is a love that weaves in collective ways. A love that reaches your heart, warping and wefting into a colorful fabric of plurality.

Loving the world

it opens and flows

reemerging . . .

Yuria Celidwen, PhD, springs from an Indigenous Maya and Nahua lineage of mystics, healers, and poets from the highlands of Chiapas, Mexico. Her scholarship on Indigenous forms of contemplation examines self-transcendence and its embodiment in prosocial behavior (reverence, ethics, compassion, kindness, awe, love, and sacredness). She calls this work the Indigenous "Ethics of Belonging" toward planetary flourishing rooted in honoring Life. She is a researcher at the University of California, Berkeley, and senior fellow at the Othering & Belonging Institute. www.yuriacelidwen.com

Rithika Merchant is a visual artist from Bombay (Mumbai), India. Her work explores comparative mythology as well as science and speculative fiction, featuring creatures and symbolism that are part of her personal visual vocabulary. She creates bodies of work that both visually link to our collective past and imagine possible new worlds that we may come to inhabit. @rithikamerchant

REFRAME

by Howard Kaplan

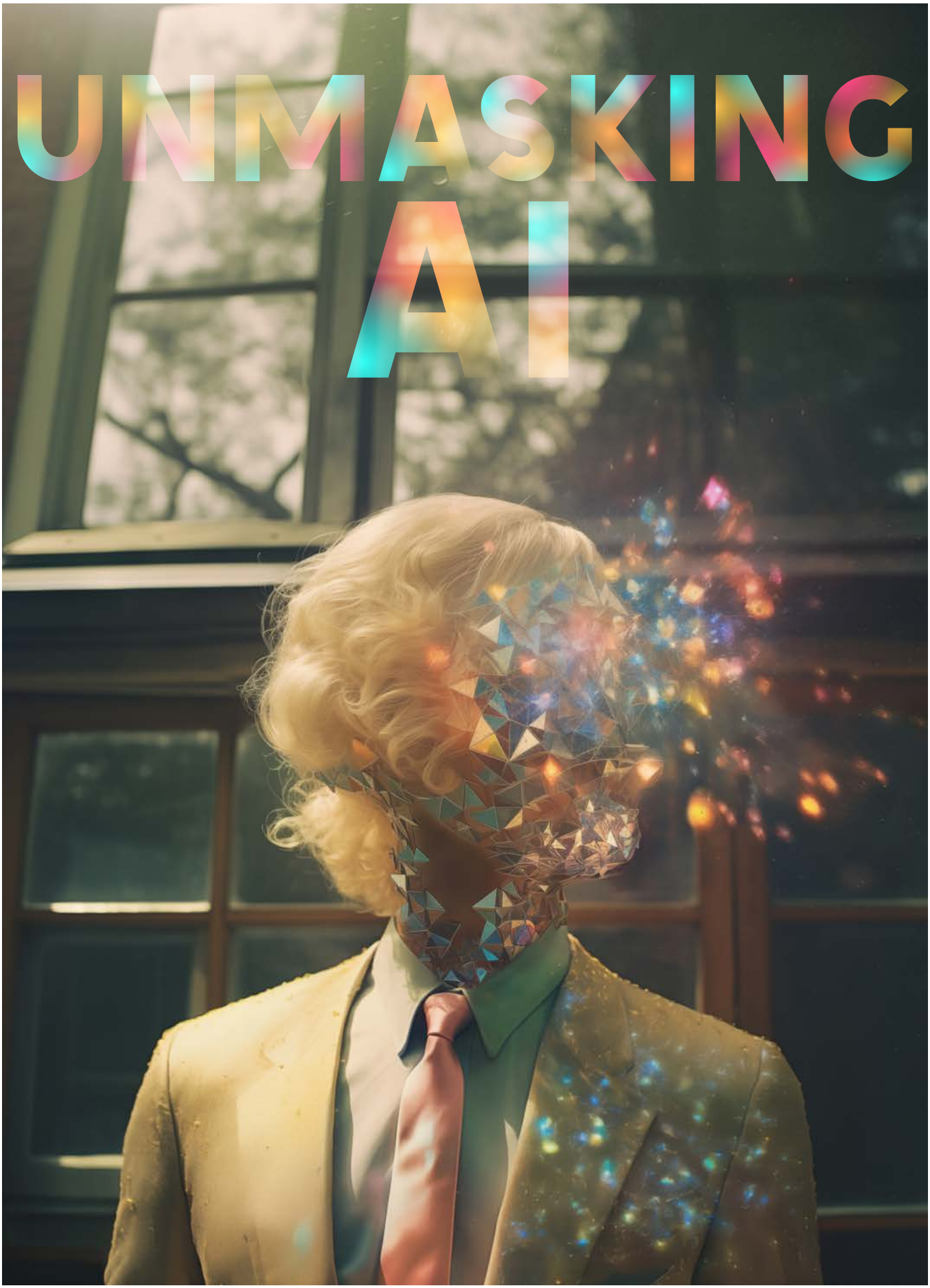
As an anthropologist and ethnographer, Huatse Gyal tells the stories of people whose lives are often overlooked. He was born and raised in a nomadic community in the Amdo region of Tibet, so his story might have easily been lost as well. But Huatse was academically gifted and embarked on what he refers to as an "uncommon" educational trajectory, becoming one of the first in his community to attend boarding school and college. His path was different than most, and it wasn't always easy. The people around him often discriminated against nomads based on their darker skin and stereotypes of being "backwards" or even "stupid." Huatse encountered such discrimination in middle school, and as a young person it was hard not to internalize it.

When he began taking classes in anthropology, the concept of cultural relativism—the idea that no culture is better or worse, so there's no hierarchy of inferiority or superiority—resonated with him. He began to understand how internalizing an externally imposed narrative can lead to harmful consequences and keep us tethered to the past. "This idea of cultural relativism and anthropology really emancipated my way of thinking. That was a moment in my life when I managed to reframe my experience and negative ideas of nomads that made me think there was something wrong with me," Huatse says. His studies became a way for him to understand his life and commit his research to helping nomads and the Tibetan people. Though he moved to the United States to attend college and graduate school, "going farther and farther away from my homeland," the Tibetan Plateau remains the focus of his research, as he makes connections between indigenous Tibetan communities and those in other parts of the world.

"My parents were nomads," Huatse says, "but I'm not a nomad in the sense that I no longer raise animals. My profession is teaching, so I have had to release and update my understanding of what it means to be a nomad." For Huatse, a nomad, as Sherman Alexie wrote in *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*, refers to people who are always in search of good grass and good land for the animals. The lifestyle is not easy, but he sees similarities in what he does now. The commonality is to be resilient. "We need to release our attachment to a past or to a sense of loss at the core of our existence. For me, now going into different countries or being in the United States and teaching is akin to the search for good grass in the sense that, as a scholar and a teacher, I'm trying to find a greener intellectual space where I can flourish and help many students."

Dr. Huatse Gyal is an anthropologist, writer, filmmaker, and assistant professor of anthropology at Rice University. His work often focuses on the lands and peoples of Tibet.

UNMASKING AI



AI ILLUSTRATION BY K.WHITEFORD

The founder of the Algorithmic Justice League shares how human bias shapes machine learning

BY

Joy Buolamwini

TO TRAIN A MACHINE LEARNING MODEL to respond to a pattern like the perceived gender of a face, one approach is to provide labeled training data. The labels represent what machine learning researchers call "ground truth." Truth as a concept is slippery. For thousands of years humans have debated what is true, whether in courts, philosophers' chairs, labs, political rallies, public forums, the playground, or when looking into mirrors—"Objects are closer than they appear."

Scientists have argued for objective truth that is uncovered through experimentation, yet science does not escape human bias and prejudice. Feminist scholars have long pointed out how Western ways of knowing, shaped by patriarchy, attempt to erase the standpoint of the observer, taking a godlike, omniscient, and detached view. However, our standpoint, where we are positioned in society, and our cultural and social experiences shape how we share and interpret our observations. Acknowledging that there is subjectivity to perceived truths brings some humility to observations and the notion of partial truths. The elephant can be perceived as many things depending on whether you touch the tail, the leg, or the trunk.

This is not to say all interpretations are valid, particularly when looking at physical phenomena. Regardless of your acceptance of physical laws, gravity and the knowledge engineers have gained about aerodynamics influence how we build airplanes. In the world of machine learning, the arbiters of ground truth—what a model is taught to be the correct classification of a certain type of data—are those who decide which labels to apply and those who are tasked with applying those labels to data. Both groups bring their own standpoint and understanding to the process. Both groups are exercising the power to decide. Decision-making power is ultimately what defines ground truth. Human decisions are subjective.

The classification systems I or other machine learning practitioners select, modify, inherit, or expand to label a dataset are a reflection of subjective goals, observations, and understandings of the world. These systems of labeling circumscribe the world of possibilities and experience for a machine learning model, which is also limited by the data available. For example, if you decide to use binary gender labels—male and female—and use them on a dataset that includes only the faces of middle-aged white actors, the system is precluded from learning about intersex, trans, or nonbinary representations and will be less equipped to handle faces that fall outside its initial binary training set. The classification system erases the existence of those groups not included in it. It can also reify the groups so that if the most dominant classification

The artist who created this image used a partial prompt in Midjourney, an app that uses generative AI to convert language prompts into images. Her partial prompt was */their gender is incomprehensible:: whimsical eccentric* 🦻 *costume, spectrum of light, cinematic, absurd surreal photography, kodak porta.* The hearing aid emoji is a kind of nonsense placeholder. Midjourney doesn't understand it, so the 🦻 encourages creative ideas versus realistic images. An alternative would be a nonsense word like "dfvnkfc."

of gender is presented in the binary male and female categorization, over time that binary categorization becomes accepted as "truth." This "truth" ignores rich histories and observations from all over the world regarding gender that acknowledge third-gender individuals or more fluid gender relationships.

When it comes to gender classification systems, the gender labels being used make an inference about gender identity, how an individual interprets their own gender in the world. A computer vision system cannot observe how someone thinks about their gender, because the system is presented only with image data. It's also true that how someone identifies with gender can change over time. In computer vision that uses machine learning, what machines are being exposed to is gender presentation, how an individual performs their gender in the way they dress, style their hair, and more. Presented with examples of images that are labeled to show what is perceived as male and as female, systems are exposed to cultural norms of gender presentation that can be reflected in length of hair, clothing, and accessories.

Some systems use geometric-based approaches, not appearance-based approaches, and have been programmed based on the physical dimensions of a human face. The scientific evidence shows how sex hormones can influence the shape of a face. Testosterone is observed to lead to a broader nose and forehead—but there are other factors that may lead to a particular nose or forehead shape, so what may be true for faces in a dataset of parliamentarians for Iceland does not necessarily apply to a set of actual faces from Senegal. Also, over time the use of geometric approaches for analyzing faces has been shown to be less effective than the appearance-based models that are learned from large labeled datasets. Coding all the rules for when a nose-to-eye-to-mouth ratio might be that of someone perceived as a woman or biologically female is a daunting task, so the machine learning approach has taken over. But this reliance on labeled data introduces its own challenges.

The representation of a concept like gender is constrained by both the classification system that is used and the data that is used to represent different groups within the classification. If we create a dataset to train a system on binary gender classification that includes only the faces of middle-aged white actors, that model is destined to struggle with gendering faces that do not resemble those in the training set. In the world of computer vision, we find that systems trained on adult faces often struggle with the faces of children, which are changing at a rapid pace as they grow and are often absent from face datasets.

The point remains: For machine learning models data is destiny, because the data provides the model with the representation of the world as curated by the makers of the system. Just as the kinds of labels that are chosen reflect human decisions, the kind of data that is made available is also a reflection of those who have the power to collect and decide which data is used to train a system. The data that is most readily available often is used out of convenience. It is convenient for Facebook to use data made available through user uploads. It is convenient for researchers to scrape the internet for data that is publicly posted. Google and Apple rely on the use of their products to amass extremely valuable datasets, such as voice data that can be collected when a user speaks to the phone to do a search. When ground truth is shaped by convenience sampling, grabbing what is most readily available and applying labels in a subjective manner, it represents the standpoint of the makers of the system, not a standalone objective truth.

A major part of my work is to dissect AI systems and show precisely how they can become biased. My early explorations taught me the importance of going beyond technical knowledge, valuing cultural knowledge, and questioning my own assumptions. We cannot assume that just because something is data driven or processed by an algorithm it is immune to bias. Labels and categories we may take for granted need to be interrogated. The more we know about the histories of racial categorization, the more we learn about how a variety of cultures approach gender, the easier it is to see the human touch that shapes AI systems. Instead of erasing our fingerprints from the creation of algorithmic systems, exposing them more clearly gives us a better understanding of what can go wrong, for whom, and why. AI reflects both our aspirations and our limitations. Our human limitations provide ample reasons for humility about the capabilities of the AI systems we create. Algorithmic justice necessitates questioning the arbiters of truth, because those with the power to build AI systems do not have a monopoly on truth.

We cannot assume that just because something is data driven or processed by an algorithm it is immune to bias.

Excerpted from the book *UNMASKING AI: My Mission to Protect What Is Human in a World of Machines* by Joy Buolamwini. Copyright © 2023 by Joy Buolamwini. Published by Random House, an imprint and division of Penguin Random House LLC. All rights reserved.

Dr. Joy Buolamwini is the founder of the Algorithmic Justice League, a groundbreaking researcher, and a renowned speaker. Her writing has been featured in publications such as *Time*, the *New York Times*, *Harvard Business Review*, and *The Atlantic*. As the Poet of Code, she creates art to illuminate the impact of artificial intelligence on society and advises world leaders on preventing AI harms. She is the recipient of numerous awards, and her MIT research on facial recognition technologies is featured in the Emmy-nominated documentary *Coded Bias*.

K. Whiteford is an emerging AI artist located in Maryland. She seamlessly fuses absurd surrealism with whimsical beauty in her AI art creations. Through her Instagram platform, she documents her captivating journey in the realm of artificial intelligence artistry. @AIinTheKitchen

CAN
I LET
ME
GO?

ON SURRENDER AND AWAKENING

SONYA RENEE TAYLOR AND ADRIENNE MAREE BROWN have been collaborators since 2017 when adrienne interviewed Sonya for her book *Pleasure Activism*. In 2020 they did an event that became the spark for not only their friendship but also the cocreation of The Institute of Radical Permission and *Journal of Radical Permission*. Here the two authors and activists talk about how Sonya came to a radically new orientation towards herself and her perspective on life.

Sonya Renee Taylor

INTERVIEWED BY

adrienne maree brown

adrienne maree brown: Who would you say that you were socialized and conditioned to be?

Sonya Renee Taylor: I was socialized and conditioned to caretake, but in a particular kind of way, like to crisis caretake. I was conditioned around parentification as a child of an addict. A lot of survival responsibilities fell on me.

And then as I got older, I was socialized to operate with a certain level of extraction, like you need to figure out how to have your needs met, and here are some strategies. Here's the strategy of desirability. Here's the strategy of smartness. Here's the strategy of hustler. These are all roles that I played as a way to extract what I needed from wherever it was locked.

Do you remember your first awakening experience that made you question that conditioning?

In 2020, the great collapse was happening both societally and in my personal life. My partner and I had broken up. My dog had terminal cancer and was about to die. I was in a country that had just gone on a complete lockdown, and I was living alone in this house that was supposed to be a place where I was going to be doing healing retreats. There was this wave of despair that came rushing toward me. I had this sense that if I did not employ whatever exists beyond me I was going to be consumed by this despair.

There was a drum in my house from a friend of mine. I got the drum, and I started chanting and playing the drum, like rebuking that wave of despair. It was the first time where I was like, Oh, I'm an invocation of all of the entities that assist me. I am at the point where I need all of the energies, all of the tools, all of the resources to make it through this experience. That was the first time it felt like there is something opening in me that knows that I cannot do this alone.

There's the way that we orient towards getting through something hard. And then there's the way that we orient towards awakening. What for you was the moment of choosing then to begin to move towards awakening in your life?

There were two moments of surrender. The first was not long after the invocation of all the energies and spirits to assist me. I was in the shower, and again, I was just like, this is the most painful thing. When is this over? Whatever "this" is I'm in. When is this over? I had been listening to gospel songs, and it was as if on cue this song played that goes, "It ain't over until God says it's over." I literally shower slid down the wall weeping, and I was just like, fine. I surrender.

Clearly, I'm out of my field of control, and there's nothing you can do except to surrender to it.

I feel like I surrendered, but it was a resistant surrender, as for a long time I experienced it like a punishment. I felt life is stripping me of everything, cause life hates me, cause I've been bad, cause I didn't get it right. I could see where all my old stories still wanted to be in the experience.

What was the second moment?

That came three years later. I was actually sitting on your couch in your house. I'd had an encounter with an energy of an old relationship, and the encounter brought up a bunch of grief, brought up a lot of pain and activation and frustration. And I was like, I don't want to feel like this like. Whatever it is that I am holding on to in such a way that it is causing me this kind of suffering—I want to be released from it.

Can I let me go?

I felt this knowing: your path is a spiritual path, Sonya. I had all kinds of stories about what that meant. I had the story that it meant I was going to become a monk. I was going to have to give up so many things. And I was like, I don't want to. I could feel all the resistance around it. I heard very clearly what there is to do. I'm being asked to say yes to this path. I sat on your couch and I said, fine. Fine! I surrender to the path that spirit has for me. I say yes to this path.

It was as if for three years life had been dragging me like a screaming toddler in the mall. And instantly I felt like I stood up and I had my own sense of my autonomy. Some part of my own internal dignity came back when I chose to stand up and walk with what life was, what life had already clearly said. The suffering instantly left.

What changed in the aftermath of those moments?

A few days later, I was also with you, and some person pulled out in front of us and nearly T-boned us. I put my arm out, and I just said to that person, "May you get where you're going safely." Then I got to the Airbnb where I was staying, and there was all this stuff that I normally would have been really activated by it. And I just was like, Oh, that's what it is! There were just all these tiny moments where the way I'm responding is so different than the me that I am used to.

I sent an email to the Airbnb host to let them know some things were missing. There is a version of Sonya that would have sent it with irritation that I had to send it at all, and with a sort of manipulation, like, let me pretend to be nice, so that I can get what I need. But I felt this purity of response.

I had the experience of knowing that every experience I ever had in life was so that I could have that moment. Every heartache, every ended relationship, every death, every single moment was so that I could write that email and be like, I have nothing to strategize or manipulate for, because everything that is life is present for me.

So what have you had to give up?

All of old Sonya. All of those orientations and adaptations that you asked me about at the beginning of this conversation: the identity of Sonya the hustler, the identity of Sonya the strategizer, the identity of Sonya the caretaker, the identity of Sonya the smart girl. Every version that I had created in response to trying to extract my needs from life had to fall away. Some of them were versions that I really loved. There's Sonya the personality that I had to give up. In some ways that is to give up Sonya and to simply be.

Do you feel like this is the beginning of an unfolding? Where are you in the becoming? And who are you becoming?

I don't have the same relationship to time, to future that I used to have—the idea that there is some place I'm trying to get. So becoming is however it is that life will unfold in whatever other moments there will be. But I don't have any investment. Or I just don't have the illusion that I have some control over that anymore.

What is one thing you'd suggest to those who are looking towards their own awakening?

I currently am in a daily meditation practice, which is really essential for me to clear mind chatter. It wants to come in and reinstate certain illusions. It wants to be like, Oh, no, remember, we actually do have control here. So meditation helps me come back to presence along the journey.

Some part of my own internal dignity came back when I chose to stand up and walk with what life was.

I had to learn to hear differently. In the beginning of this process, I was given things that at the time were scary, like auditory messages. In our societal context, people tell you you're crazy and you go to a hospital. Thank goodness that I had a therapist who is also a spiritual practitioner, who was able to tell me you're not crazy, Sonya. You're receiving guidance. What does it look like to surrender to the guidance you're receiving?

So I recommend a daily practice. Ask yourself, what is your daily practice that helps you hear?

adrienne maree brown grows healing ideas in public through her multi-genre writing, music, and podcasts. Informed by twenty-five years of movement facilitation, somatics, Octavia E. Butler scholarship, and her work as a doula, adrienne has nurtured Emergent Strategy, Pleasure Activism, Radical Imagination, and Transformative Justice as ideas and practices for transformation. She is the author/editor of seven published texts and the founder of the Emergent Strategy Ideation Institute, where she is now the writer-in-residence.

Sonya Renee Taylor is a *New York Times* best-selling author; world-renowned activist and thought leader on racial justice, body liberation, and transformational change; international award-winning artist; and founder of The Body Is Not an Apology (TBINAA), a global digital media and education company exploring the intersections of identity, healing, and social justice through the framework of radical self-love. Sonya is the author of seven books, including *The Body Is Not an Apology: The Power of Radical Self Love*. www.sonyareneetaylor.com

IN SEARCH OF SUPREME BLISS

IN SEARCH OF SUPREME BLISS

Overcoming attachment through focus on mastering bliss

BY *Elena Pakhoutova*

AS EXPLAINED IN TIBETAN COMMENTARIES, practices focused on the tantric deity Chakrasamvara and his consort Vajrayogini are means of overcoming attachment, desire, and the ignorance of not realizing the true nature of reality, which is the emptiness of all phenomena. These mental afflictions are among the fundamental causes of the endless cycle of birth, death, and rebirth known as samsara. The central deities in this painting are in sexual embrace, a symbolic representation of secret tantric teachings on the union of wisdom and method necessary for achieving full awakening. In tantra, this state of awareness is also known as the supreme bliss.

The name Chakrasamvara in Sanskrit means Circle (*chakra*) of Gathered Together Deities (*samvara*) in reference to the deities representing all aspects of body, speech, and mind required for a practitioner's nonconceptual realization of emptiness through experiences of subtle bliss. Tibetan translations of the name clarify its meaning, emphasizing bliss and pleasure and forming the name Demchok (*bde mchog*), meaning Supreme Bliss.

Chakrasamvara practices are meant for the initiated to help cultivate and experience the stages of bliss that enable them to attain the subtlest level of mind, or pure awareness known as the clear light. With this awareness they are able to gain insight into the meaning of emptiness and eventually become a buddha.

This painting's well-recorded composition presents a group of deities that are neither part of the mandala of Chakrasamvara nor belong to the same practice, but they are loosely grouped as they all relate to practices for extending life. Prolonging lifespan is not the ultimate objective of long-life practices, but it is considered a helpful condition that allows more time to work toward the goal of awakening.

1. *White Chakrasamvara (Supreme Bliss [of] Realized/Accomplished Awakening) with Consort Vajrayogini*
2. *Avalokiteshvara (One Seeing in Every [Direction]) [as] Heruka (One Sporting Skull-cup of Blood) with Consort Yogini*
3. *White Chakrasamvara (Supreme Bliss) with Consort Vajrayogini*
4. *Vajravarahi (Clarifying Wisdom)*
5. *Goddess Amritavajra (Deathless Immutable or Immortal Vajra)*
6. *Vijaya (Victorious)*
7. *White Amitayus (Boundless Life) with Consort Vajrayogini [in] the tradition of Rechung Dorje Drakpa (1083/4–1161)*

See this painting in the exhibition *Masterworks: A Journey through Himalayan Art* at the Rubin Museum of Art.

White Chakrasamvara with Consort, and Six Deities; from The Twenty-seven Tantric Deities series designed and commissioned by Situ Panchen (1700–1774) from Tsewang Drakpa of Jeto; Kham region, eastern Tibet; ca. 18th century; pigments on cloth; Rubin Museum of Art; C2006.66.15 (HAR 432)

Elena Pakhoutova is a senior curator of Himalayan art at the Rubin Museum of Art and holds a PhD in Asian art history from the University of Virginia. She has curated several exhibitions at the Rubin, most recently *Death Is Not the End* (2023), *The Power of Intention: Reinventing the (Prayer) Wheel* (2019), and *The Second Buddha: Master of Time* (2018).

REIMAGINE

by Howard Kaplan

In the fall of 2004, Arun Ayyagari was scheduled to attend a technical workshop in Nuremberg, Germany. The flight missed its scheduled takeoff from Newcastle, England, and kept getting delayed. Rather than arriving early in the evening, he landed in Germany after midnight when the hotel front desk had closed for the night. After a taxi dropped him off, he stood on the empty street, ringing the bell. But as the minutes passed it seemed unlikely anyone was coming to let him inside.

When Arun turned around, he noticed the taxi was still at the curb, the driver craning his head to see what was happening. "Everything was closed. I was tired, hungry," he said, adding, "language was a problem, although there was nobody on the streets to talk to." The driver found a restaurant that was about to close: the lights were dimming, the neon sign just turned off. But when Arun opened the door and explained his situation, the owner prepared some food for him and even refused to take any money.

The restaurant owner asked where Arun was staying for the night. Arun told him that the hotel front desk was closed. The owner didn't hesitate in telling him that he would arrange a place for him to stay. Arun politely refused and said he couldn't accept the offer. But the restaurant owner insisted and then drove Arun to a nearby friend's house where he woke the friend up. "Everything was so surreal that I was beyond grateful. After having my breakfast in the morning, I naively asked this gentleman why he trusted me, and he replied, 'We are all human and should help each other.'" For Arun, that became what he refers to as a "lightbulb moment."

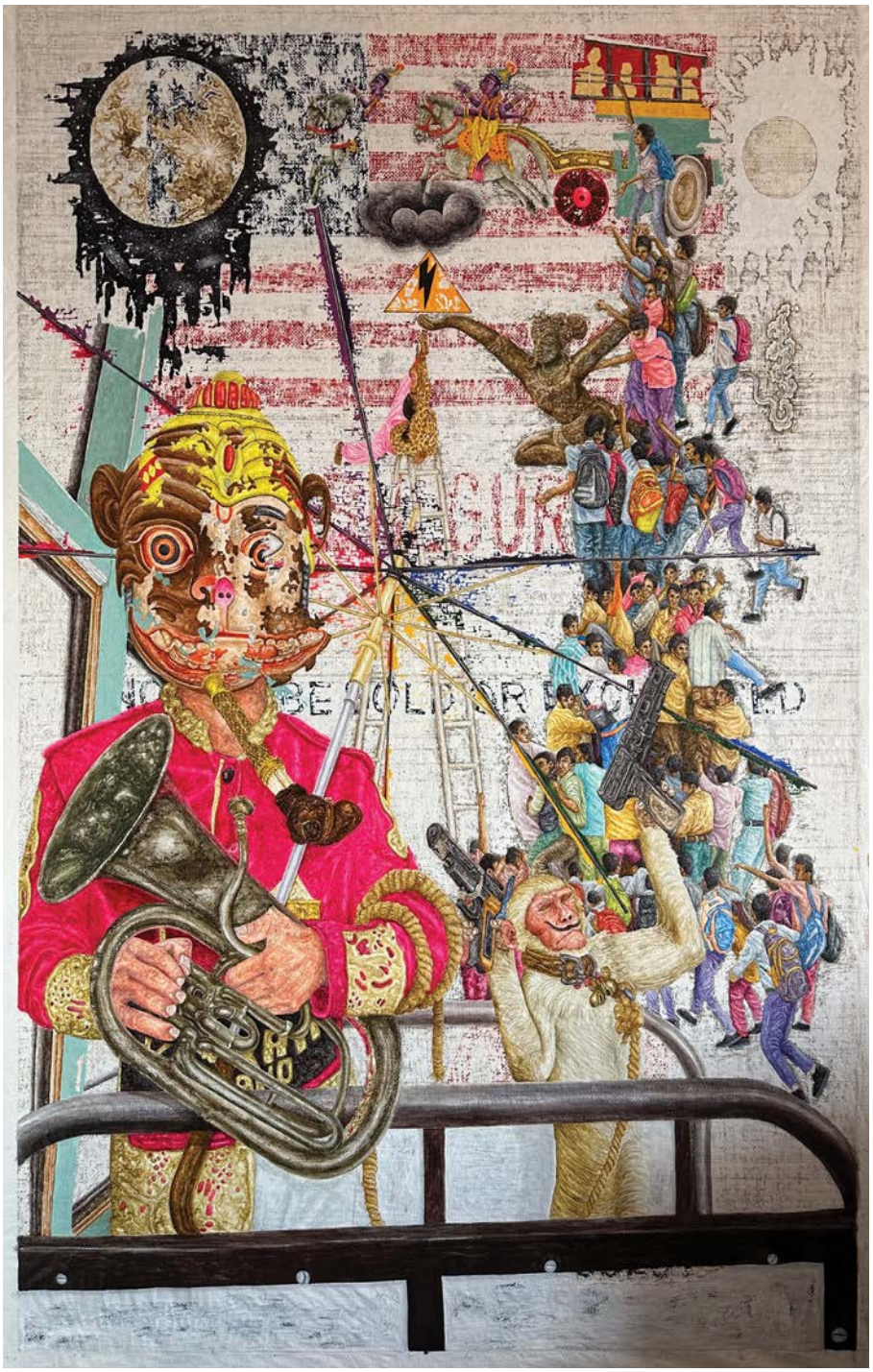
That transformational conversation forever changed his thinking. Ever since, he has been someone who consciously helps others. "Stranger or acquaintance, near or dear, needy or not, it does not matter to me," he says. This encounter helped Arun realize that self-actualization can come from actions big and small, including helping individuals, communities, or any cause that can leave an indelible impact on other people's lives.

This new way of thinking led Arun to become involved in leadership roles in nonprofit organizations like Lead Foundation Global, where as president he champions youth initiatives and cultivates leadership skills. He does this by collaborating with the United Nations and other like-minded organizations in focusing on sustainable development goals, particularly quality education and clean water.

Those twenty-four hours in Germany helped him redefine what it means to be a citizen of the world and to expand on the definition of the word help. "Life, I've come to understand," Arun adds, "is the best dictionary."

Arun Ayyagari is an editor and policy analyst who writes on foreign policy, geopolitics, and international relations. He is a fellow at American Indo-Pacific Forum, a think tank in Washington, DC. He is an advanced pilot, commercial pilot, and drone pilot, and teaches US history, social studies, rocket science, and aerospace engineering.

THE BUS S



Finding inspiration in community and daily life

Tenzin Gyurmey Dorjee

INTERVIEWED BY

Tsewang Lhamo

REIMAGINE: HIMALAYAN ART NOW presents artworks by thirty-two contemporary artists, many from the Himalayan region and diaspora, juxtaposed with objects from the Rubin Museum's collection. Co-curator Tsewang Lhamo interviewed artist Tenzin Gyurmey Dorjee about his process creating a new work for this exhibition.

Tsewang Lhamo: What is your work in *Reimagine* about? What does it mean to you, and why is it important for you?
Tenzin Gyurmey Dorjee: My works are important to me because of their subjects. Most of the time, I choose my family, my friends, and people I deal with on a daily basis as the main subjects.

TOPS HERE

For this show, I chose the local bus stand in New Delhi because I've been using that space for a very long time. This bus stand has become kind of my family in a way. So the characters in the painting, along with the materials, all come from my experience being on the bus.

There are lots of people here in this artwork, and it reflects the fact that India is the most populated country in the world. Delhi is one of the most dense cities in India. When I go to the bus station in the morning, which is the busiest time of day, people do not fit in the bus. So in the painting, there are characters that come out from the bus, sort of like a tower going up in the sky.

Some of the characters shown are Indian circus performers, musicians in bands who play instruments during marriage seasons, and sex workers, who are commonly seen at bus stations in India.

What this particular work means to me is that despite having your own country, culture, and religion, without understanding each other on a humanity level, I think we all are lonely and narrow-minded. Our differences shouldn't act like a cage.

What is your preferred medium? What materials did you use to create this piece, and is there any significance in those materials?

I normally paint with acrylic on a tarp. We call it *drochak bureh* (*drochak* means barley and *bureh* means sack). This material is important for me because when we were kids you could see these bags everywhere in our towns on broken windows to cover them, during construction, as garbage cans, and some people even made bath loofahs out of them. During college, canvas was so expensive for me, so I began to use this material.

Our differences shouldn't act like a cage.

I remember *drochatk bureh* when I was a kid in India too. It's a nostalgic piece of material for us. Can you share a little history about how they got to the Tibetan settlements in India?
I see it as a symbol of our refugee situation. My parents would say, "We are refugees. That's why we are getting this." The bags were filled with food supplies as aid, and they were given by the United States to Tibetan refugees back then. The ones you see now are quite different from the ones from back then, especially the ones in Delhi. But they also carry its role in a different way, used for different things.

What sacred objects from the Rubin Museum collection did you choose to engage with in your work and why?
I'm playing with three objects from the collection: the Monkey Mask, the Kang Ling leg bone trumpet, and the Garland Bearing Apsara wooden carving that the Rubin recently returned to Nepal. I saw it in the newspaper and thought it was very brave of the Rubin Museum to give it back to Nepal, so you can see its return in my work as well.

I use the Monkey Mask for my character because of Hanuman, who is very loyal to Ram. I want to show my loyalty to the Indian community, like Hanuman does to Ram. Indians are very kind to us. On top of that I use the Tibetan mask, which represents me. With the Kang Ling trumpet, it is a juxtaposition with the Indian band Baja instruments. The Kang Ling reminds us of emptiness and impermanence, and the band Baja is kind of materialistic and represents attachment, because it's usually present in marriage ceremonies in India.

All stolen sacred cultural artifacts have the right to return. They are the ancestral kin of indigenous people from the places they came from. The return of the Apsara included in your work shows me what the future holds. May we see all of them returned in this lifetime.

How do you reframe your perspective when you feel stuck while creating art?
I normally stop and try to find humor in my work, and then I call my friends and talk about it. It somehow changes the way I see my work when I joke about it with my friends. From there, I am able to create new paths. Even my father says, when you are going through great misery or you are stuck somewhere, you should realize that there's always humor in it. I hope my paintings can bring humor into peoples' lives. Making a full painting and letting it go by selling it and then making another one—that is part of the process for me.

What brings you peace and joy?
Love. Without love there is no joy as a being. It makes you lonely. That's the special thing about humans. We can love each other without any kind of boundaries about our culture and everything else.

What future or collaborations do you envision for our art community?
Because of technology, I can see what other artists are doing and what galleries are showing new works. It helps a lot when seeking inspiration. Because we are able to communicate so easily now due to technology, it will be better for our art community, and art can better technology and community too.

When I was in school, I never liked to collaborate with people. I found it a disturbance when I needed personal space. I think in other places, even when you collaborate, there is still some personal space. But in India we don't have any personal space.

Someday in the future, I want to collaborate with my senior artists. That inspiration came from Andy Warhol and Jean Michel Basquiat when they collaborated.

See *chants of a monkey mind,* Monkey Mask, and Leg Bone Trumpet in the exhibition *Reimagine: Himalayan Art Now* on view at the Rubin Museum from March 15 to October 6, 2024.

Tenzin Gyurmey Dorjee was born in 1987 in Kamrao Village, Himachal Pradesh, India. He is interested in exploring the paradoxes present in ordinary things and how global changes in culture, politics, climate, and science can impact local surroundings. His father, Tulku Troegyal, taught him drawing in the Tibetan traditional style at the age of six, and he has been practicing arts professionally since 2013. His studio practice is currently based in Delhi. www.tenzingyurmeydorjee.com

Tsewang Lhamo, also known as Tselha (they/ཁོང་), is a queer Tibetan multidisciplinary artist, self-taught filmmaker, and cultural producer based in Queens, New York. Born in Nepal, they grew up in a Tibetan refugee settlement in South India. Previously a graphic/web designer, they founded the Yakpo Collective, a Tibetan contemporary art platform centering Tibetan creatives around the world. They are also one of the organizing members of Tibetan Equality Project, a space dedicated to the queer Tibetan community in diaspora. In the future, they plan to create feature-length queer Tibetan films. www.tselha.com

Tenzin Gyurmey Dorjee (b. 1987, Himachal Pradesh, India; lives and works in Himachal Pradesh, India); *chants of a monkey mind*; 2023; acrylic on tarp; courtesy of Dolma Chonzom Bhutia

Monkey Mask; Bhutan; ca. 19th century; wood and polychrome; Rubin Museum of Art; gift of Bruce Miller and Jane Casey; C2016.1

Leg Bone Trumpet (Kang Ling); Tibet; 18th–19th century; human bone, copper, coral, leather; Rubin Museum of Art; gift of Robert and Lois Baylis; SC2019.3.2

THE DANCE OF TIME AND SPACE

How a reorientation to one's place in the world and across history can lead to healing

BY

Jonathan Dickinson

MANY OF US UNDERESTIMATE HOW strongly we identify with the time and place in which we live. Like a data byte in the digital current, it is hard to imagine the larger context that surrounds us. Yet events that provide a glimpse at this bigger picture, or which become shared reference points for large groups of people, tend to shape our identities in quite significant ways. Likewise, feeling disconnected from our histories can have a destabilizing effect on our lives and our mental health.

In the early 1920s, Alfred Korzybski, a Polish American scholar and founder of general semantics, introduced the twin concepts of "time-binding" and "space-binding." Taken together, these two ideas provide a bifocal lens that clarifies how we perceive ourselves as humans and our relationship to each other and our environment. Examples at the cutting edge of psychedelic healing demonstrate the power this kind of identity building can provide, even in situations of desperation, a lesson that may apply more broadly.

Bridging Time and Space

Time-binding, as Korzybski conceived it, represents the distinctly human ability for one generation to pick up where the previous generation left off and to continue to build on what came before. This is how we develop from fire, to spear, to plow, to jet engine, to virtual reality. Involved in this is the act of transmitting information and culture in a way that transcends space. It describes how we learn from the experiments of our ancestors and draw forward the empirical wisdom of the past to apply it to the present. Time-binding doesn't only involve technological information but also other intangible assets such as our values, philosophies, political identities, or artistic styles, which are also bound in historical time.

In contrast to time-binding, space-binding involves information that does not change much over time. Genetics are a good example. Physically each generation begins in largely the same way as the preceding ones. Any significant evolution requires hundreds of thousands of years or more of gradual change. Space-binding is present in long-standing societal traditions and mythologies, which evolve over long timelines. It can also involve transoceanic exploration or interactions with other cultures, because unlike time-bound communication, these activities result in very gradual progression. People who exhibit space-binding tendencies tend to prioritize concrete, sensory information and often have a strong connection to their immediate physical surroundings.

While these may seem like opposing forces, they are, of course, intimately intertwined. The dance between them defines the movements of human history. Time-binding provides the foundation upon which we build our future, drawing wisdom from the past to inform our present actions. Space-binding anchors us deeply in our environment and our traditions, providing the point from which we move outwards to explore the far reaches of the globe. Most major advancements in communication, from the printing press to the internet, reflect both of these concepts, bridging us in time to the knowledge of the past, as well as in space to the rest of the world.

Healing through Iboga and Ibogaine

The anthropologist James Fernandez used Korzybski's terms time- and space-binding to describe similarities in the healing use of iboga, a powerful psychedelic plant, among both Central African pygmies and North American heroin users. His use of these ideas helps to illustrate how time- and space-binding play into healing processes.

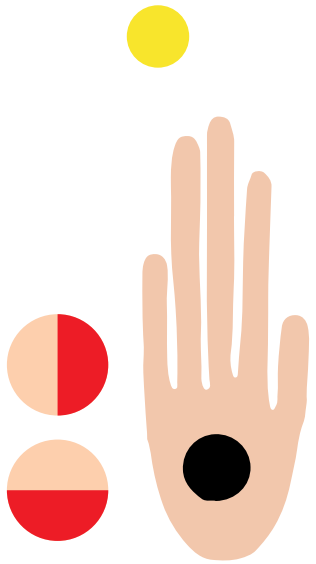
ILLUSTRATION BY VICTORIA TOPPING

Iboga is a shrub endemic to Gabon, a small country on the western coast of Africa that shares a border with the Congo. The plant's roots contain ibogaine, a psychedelic compound that can launch a trip that lasts twenty-four hours or more. A growing body of anecdotal reports and clinical research suggest that it has numerous health benefits.

In the late nineteenth century, amid Gabon's suffering at the hands of colonists and slave traders, the coastal Bantu populations came in closer contact with inland Pygmy communities, who introduced the use iboga as a ritual and healing tool. Bwiti, the spiritual practice born from this intersection, became invaluable for several Gabonese communities as armed resistances against colonists faltered. Iboga emerged as a way to practically combat the decreased fertility in the labor camps, as well as to recover the sense of spiritual and moral authority that had been granted to Europeans in the previous century. For many, the practice helped them take what they had learned from interactions with outsiders and weave it into a renewed identity.

On the other side of the world, in 1962, a young heroin user from Staten Island, New York, named Howard Lotsof ingested some ibogaine that he received from a chemist friend. After a long, grueling trip, he found it relieved the excruciating opioid withdrawal and his desire to use heroin. Since the National Institute on Drug Abuse abandoned ibogaine research in the mid-1990s, its use has grown among clinics in Mexico and elsewhere, which are largely focused on providing drug detox and other healing services. Ibogaine remains the only pharmacotherapy that can reduce physical withdrawals from opioids in that way, but it appears to provide more than just symptomatic relief.

Fernandez found the pathologies of the colonial world arose from the "diminution or loss of one's [orientation] in time and space," something equally visible in colonialism's historic interruption of native cultures, as in the chronic influences of imperialism within occidental culture itself. The combined visionary effects and the healing properties of iboga and the ibogaine extracted from it served in



very distinct contexts to bind individuals back into a collective identity. In Bwiti they called this returning to the "Path of Life and Death" and a reengagement with village life. In the West, this looks like re-establishing ourselves in a manageable relationship to our distinct sets of social expectations.

A Broader View on Healing

In the past few years, the clinic that I cofounded, Ambio Life Sciences, has received hundreds of US special forces veterans to our facilities in Mexico. Available treatments for "operator syndrome" have failed to grasp the complexity and variety of issues that veterans face, so many have turned to seeking psychedelic treatments outside of the United States. A recent study from Stanford University showed that thirty of our patients had remission of traumatic brain injuries derived from chronic exposure to explosions and firing high-caliber weapons. These changes are visible on fMRI scans even several days after a single treatment and appear to be further improved upon follow-up a month later. Nothing else known to medicine accomplishes this type of physiological improvement.

Among veterans who attend our program, we witness physical aspects of healing as well as a renewed sense of identity and purpose. Many assume that trauma emerges from seeing horrible things in combat, but many special forces operators don't identify this way. In fact, much of the emotional turmoil arises upon retirement. After being so highly trained and performing at such a high level under specific conditions, the end of a career can lead to a crisis of purpose, especially in the wake of grief from the loss of friends to battle or suicide. Going through the ibogaine experience seems to help ground people in the current moment (space-binding), while also helping them to sift through what is valuable to carry forward from their past while they explore new habits and a new identity (time-binding). These treatments happen in groups, and many veterans and first responders have referred friends in need, which has helped to turn the experience into a collective reference point, something that appears to be important in the healing process.

In these examples, healing emerges through a reorientation to time and space. It calls us to look at the process of how we heal in a holistic way. As psychiatric ideas about "neurotransmitter imbalances" prove to be insufficient to describe the general malaise, we have to acknowledge that how we approach our narrative about mental health can have the unintended consequence of further alienating us by explaining away symptoms that are actually situational, and which often emerge as an inner motivator to recalibrate and make some changes. Rather than treating symptoms alone, thinking about time- and space-binding may help us to incorporate the power of art and story, the formation of shared values, and the experience of rites of passage back into our healing efforts, which could prove critical for how we approach mental health in the future.

Jonathan Dickinson is the cofounder and CEO of Ambio Life Sciences, which operates ibogaine clinics for addiction, traumatic brain injury, and other treatments. He is also initiated into Dissoumba/Fang and Ngonde Missoko branches of Bwiti in Gabon. Learn more at https://ambio.life.

Victoria Topping is a multimedia artist from the United Kingdom. Her color-saturated, psychedelic, heavily layered collages are inspired by music, flora and fauna, and retro ephemera, but the golden thread that binds all of her work together is a sense of unadulterated joy. @victoriatoppingstudio

ILLUSTRATION BY ANUJ SHRESTHA

ATTACHMENT THEORY THROUGH THE LENS OF SOCIAL NEUROSCIENCE

BY *Pascal Vrtička*

> *"The propensity to make strong emotional bonds to particular individuals is a basic component of human nature."*
>
> *—John Bowlby*

ATTACHMENT IS A WORD that seems to be on everyone's lips these days, especially on social media, where it comes up in association with relationships, parenting, mental health, and more. As a social neuroscientist who has studied human attachment for almost two decades, I notice how the discussions online, encompassing a wide range of perspectives, often result in disagreement and confusion. I also see how exploring attachment through the combined lenses of psychology and social neuroscience offers a clarifying and unifying path forward. Such a framework helps to unravel the neuropsychological basis of our fundamental social nature.

ATTACHMENT THEORY

Human infants, as compared to other mammals, are born early and helpless. They cannot survive without constant, intensive care. Put differently, infants strongly rely on external coregulation—help from others to maintain physical and mental balance (homeostasis) and to successfully predict and respond to constantly changing environmental demands (allostasis). What is more, infants' dependence on social closeness and protection lasts much longer than in other mammals due to a vastly prolonged developmental period. Evolution has therefore equipped infants with sophisticated social survival tools. These tools function to ensure that infants can signal when they need support and that their signals reliably elicit an immediate and appropriate caregiving response.

Starting in the 1950s, John Bowlby and Mary Ainsworth were the first to recognize and systematically explore the above mechanisms by developing attachment theory. At the core of their research and theorizing was the realization that—because all infants need to develop strong, enduring emotional bonds to significant others for survival—it is not the presence versus absence or the "strength" of attachment that is most important. What counts above all is the quality of the infant-caregiver attachment and how it varies between different infant-caregiver pairs.

Another key ingredient of attachment theory is the notion that infants will start forming expectations and predictions about future social interactions based on past interactions with their caregivers. Here, two aspects are of particular importance: how much effort it takes to elicit a caregiving response and how efficient the caregiving response is in alleviating distress. Accordingly, a high-quality infant-caregiver interaction requires little effort from the infant to elicit care and is very effective in helping the infant with allostasis and thereby restoring homeostasis. That is why support seeking under distress is deemed the primary attachment strategy associated with a secure attachment pattern. Finally, attachment theory assumes that the above considerations can be extended from infants to children, adolescents, and adults, as the need for coregulation under distress remains a prominent hallmark of our species across the entire lifespan.

HOW DOES SOCIAL NEUROSCIENCE FIT IN?

Social neuroscience is the study of the neurobiology underlying human social behavior. It can shed light on the

neuropsychological basis of our strong dependence on social closeness and care to maintain homeostasis and perform allostasis. There is growing evidence that our brain treats our own resources and the resources provided by others almost interchangeably. The less we have to worry and the more helping hands—literally as well as figuratively speaking—we have available when we are in need, the more energy we can conserve. We can then use this energy for other activities like exploration, learning, and self-care. It therefore makes perfect sense to ensure close social connection to others and seek their help and support when facing a challenge.

Social neuroscience can also help explain what happens if our social resources are reduced or when it becomes difficult for us to reliably predict their availability under distress—in other words, if our primary attachment strategy associated with secure attachment becomes increasingly futile and inefficient. Because we are still in need of coregulation to perform allostasis, we must come up with compensation strategies.

One strategy, called "individual fight," aims at increasing our own physical and mental resources to face challenges independently. If nobody is there to help us, we need to fend for ourselves. In attachment terms, we start employing a secondary attachment strategy related to avoidance and attachment system deactivation. Another strategy, "social flight," aims at socially reconnecting to others by increasing our support-seeking attempts and thus the chances of our cries for help being heard. In attachment terms, we employ a secondary attachment strategy linked to anxiety and attachment system hyperactivation.

Crucially, both avoidant and anxious secondary attachment strategies are meaningful and often necessary as they represent adaptive responses to specific environmental demands. And they usually work quite efficiently, especially to resolve short-term increased allostatic demands under moderate distress. We should therefore not regard these two insecure attachment strategies as bad or dysfunctional as such. That said, prolonged or intensive use of compensation strategies inevitably leads to wear and tear and thus constitutes a prominent risk factor for the emergence of physical and mental health issues.

Social neuroscience can also illustrate what happens if we experience a complete lack of social resources or if they become a threat by themselves. This usually happens when we face prolonged adversity associated with a diverse range of socioeconomic stressors (including poverty, parental mental health issues or substance abuse, etc.) or repeated experiences of neglect or maltreatment. It yields what we call "tertiary disorganized strategies" with two main neurobiological fingerprints.

On the one hand, prolonged unavailability of others for coregulation and allostasis will give rise to a pattern of hypo-arousal and emotional blunting, because the cost of constant, intensive self-regulation eventually becomes unsustainable. On the other hand, repeated maltreatment will result in a pattern of hyper-arousal characterized by increased emotional sensitivity. We link this pattern with an often-observed approach-avoidance conflict due to the maltreating caregivers' dual role of providing both care and being a source of threat. Since these tertiary disorganized strategies are much more rigid and extreme, they also bear a much larger potential for allostatic overload and ensuing physical and mental health issues.

A UNIFYING FRAMEWORK

How then can a combined psychology and social neuroscience framework help to resolve confusion and unify perspectives on attachment? I believe the crucial element is the addition of objective neurobiological data. If a consistent neurobiological pattern emerges across studies that employed different attachment measures, the overlapping social neuroscience component can help find common denominators. This will also clarify definitions and technical meanings of attachment terms that vary considerably depending on the psychology tradition and research method they were initially derived from.

We can also compare objective neurobiological data pertaining to attachment with corresponding findings from other social neuroscience domains and check for overlaps. For example, the above-delineated framework draws on Social Baseline Theory as well as other considerations associated with the neurobiological basis of social, emotional, and cognitive information processing and social allostasis. Such comparisons show that attachment shares many properties with other vital neuropsychological functions and that research and theory pertaining to these other functions can fruitfully inform and extend our knowledge about attachment.

We still have a lot to learn about attachment. But taking a combined psychology and social neuroscience perspective offers many pathways to better understand ourselves as individuals and as a species that is ultimately reliant on one another.

Dr. Pascal Vrtička is an associate professor and principal investigator of the Social Neuroscience of Human Attachment (SoNeAt) Lab at the University of Essex in Colchester, United Kingdom. In addition, he acts as coordinating board president of the special interest research group Social Neuroscience of Human Attachment (SIRG SoNeAt) situated within the Society for Emotion and Attachment Studies (SEAS), where he also is an associate member of the executive board. Learn more about his work at pvrticka.com.

Anuj Shrestha is an illustrator and cartoonist currently living in Philadelphia, PA. His illustration work has appeared in the *New York Times*, *New Yorker*, *Washington Post*, *ProPublica*, and *Playboy*, among others. His comics have received gold medals from The Society of Illustrators. He is fond of Italian horror movies, dumplings with chili oil, and chihuahuas.

REALIZE

by Howard Kaplan

Born in Tibet, Chime Dolma grew up in a nomadic herding family, with yaks, *dris* (female yaks), sheep, goats, and horses under her care. As a young child, she developed a deep connection to the animals. The natural world was her classroom, Mother Nature her teacher. "I spent my childhood on the mountains and had many mountains to myself. I could talk to the mountains and to the rivers. It gave me a deep sense of freedom and liberty."

Chime loved nature, but when she was in her teens, she watched some of the kids from town walk to school and began to think, "Oh, I wish I could have their life." Nomadic life gave her the ability to exist in a certain way, but it was also tough on a young person. She had to wake before sunrise and not get to sleep until nine or ten in the evening after a day of physically strenuous work. She never had the opportunity to attend school in Tibet; she first learned to read and write in India, after having to uproot her life and immerse herself in a different cultural, linguistic, and religious environment. "I think my imagination as a child was quite different. I followed that imagination and now live quite the opposite life that I had before."

After a year in India, she moved with her family to New York, first settling in Crown Heights, Brooklyn, before attending Middlebury College in Vermont. It was a difficult but rewarding journey. "I believe I was drawn to education, and am an educator today, because of my deep connection to the Tibetan community," Chime says. In graduate school, this connection to her Tibetan heritage made her question her place in the world because she felt a huge responsibility to do something about the plight of Tibetans. At the same time, she read books that discussed the danger of having a single story and clinging to one particular identity. These concurrent ideas propelled Chime "to think deeply about who I am and what it means to be part of a shared humanity." She dedicated herself to helping Tibetans who are struggling or don't have the same access to educational opportunities or even health care that she had.

Chime doesn't have all the answers yet, but community and identity are ideas she continues to explore as she asks herself, "How can I best serve a larger purpose in the world?"

Chime Dolma is the cofounder and president of YindaYin Coaching, a nonprofit organization that primarily serves immigrant communities in New York by focusing on community empowerment, education, and mentorship. She is an educator and currently works as the director of global studies and a history teacher at Riverdale Country School. Chime also serves on the advisory council of the Rubin Museum.

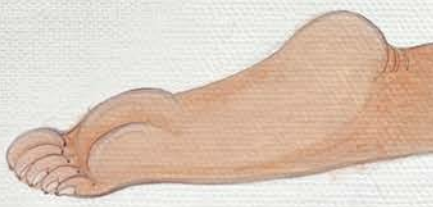
Listening to

How solitude brings us into a deeper relationship with ourselves

Antonella Lumini

INTERVIEWED AND TRANSLATED FROM ITALIAN BY

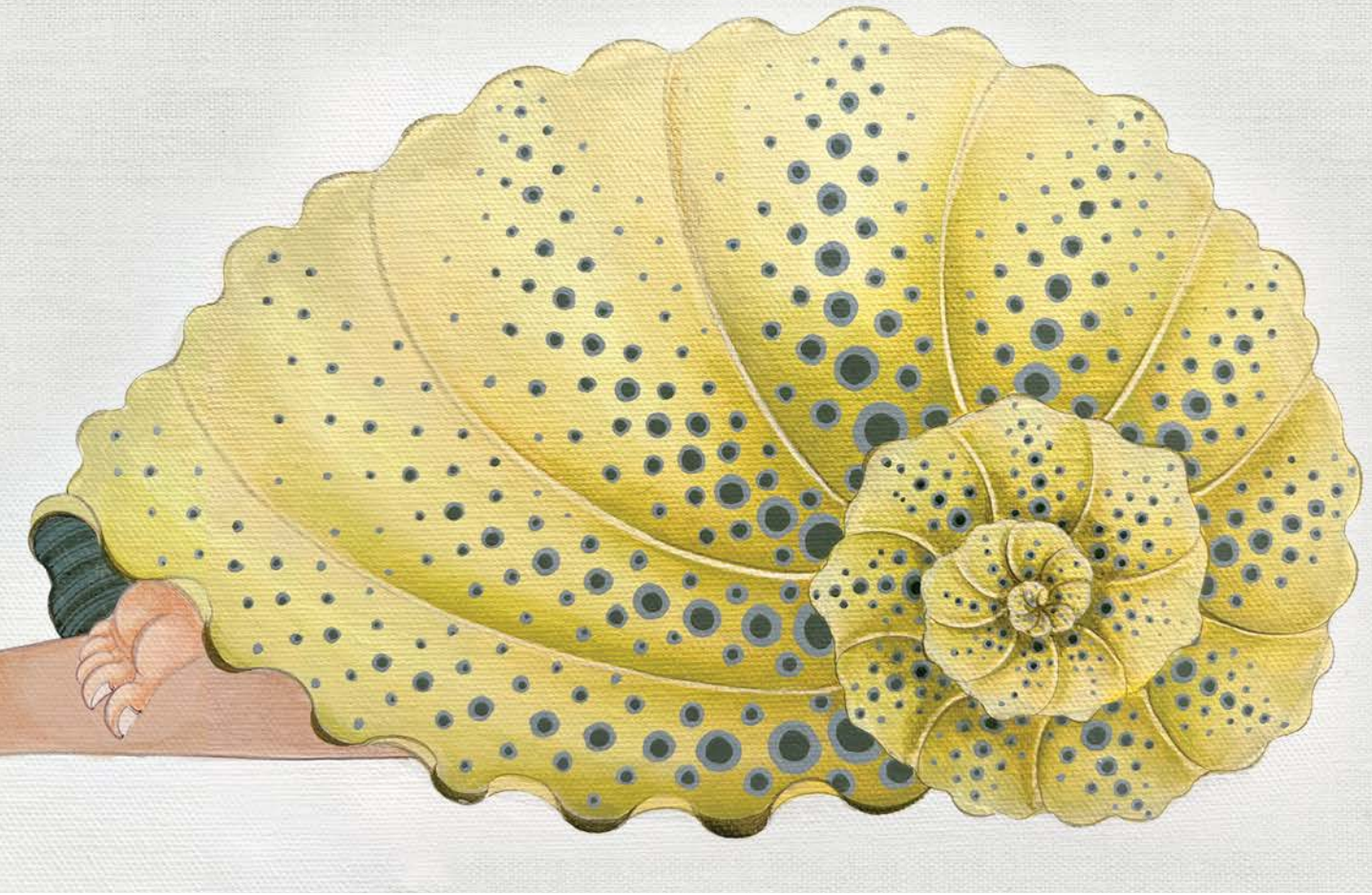
Patrizia De Libero and Jon Pepper



ARTWORK BY UURIINTUYA DAGVASAMBUU

the Silence

ANTONELLA LUMINI IS KNOWN as a metropolitan hermit. In 1980 at twenty-eight years old an illness changed her life. Finding the reason for her existence became so essential that she began to walk new paths, searching for balance. Her search led her to poustinia, a practice of silence and solitude derived from the Orthodox tradition of eliminating distractions so one can hear the word of God. Antonella lives an ordinary life in her house in the center of Florence that allows for periods of deep silence away and on a daily basis.



Jon Pepper and Patrizia De Libero: The theme for this issue relates to letting go of attachments and seeing things anew. Many of us may like the idea of opening ourselves to a more spiritual life, but at the same time, most people want a comfortable, material life. What is your perspective on this issue?

Antonella Lumini: We are dominated by materialist reason and impulses. This closes our perception and prevents us from investigating our potential—which is linked to our essence and forces from beyond.

I feel it is very important, the conversion of materialistic reason. In this regard quantum physics has been very helpful by demonstrating that an integral part of reality belongs to the invisible realm. So, if we remove the invisible, we cut ourselves off from a possibility and prevent feeling the stimulus to investigate unseen dimensions in life.

But there is a possibility of an underlying awakening because this invisible dimension lives inside human nature. So, from one side, nowadays there is more psychic sickness, as the soul does not find the way towards the light that yearns to reach us. And on the other hand, a vision of life based on materialistic goods and technology makes us more dependent, more attached.

This is a vicious circle. The feeling of lack produces more attachment to the material and our mask—and at the same time puts us in contact with the anguish of seeing there is not a solution in material goods. Only the spiritual dimension can break this attachment and let the mask drop.

Can you speak about the difference between looking for something instead of allowing ourselves to be found?

There are two very important passages in the Bible that speak about the beginning. In Genesis, when God creates the sky and the earth, and in the Gospel of John, the Prologue: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."

For me, those passages are important milestones for this theme. They are about an intrinsic movement of the divine. Jewish mysticism speaks about the beginning as an ontological principle. That reminds us "to be"—so the ontologic beginning is something from which the state of being is generated. It is not a temporal principle anymore—but a principle that is always in action. It unfolds itself constantly.

In the Bible the creation is ex nihilo—a creation from nothingness. This passage from nothingness is a great mystery. Therefore, the beginning is the ontological principle that allows the constant passage from nothingness to manifestation.

Being is already manifested. And yet, it is obscure, hidden. The more consciousness expands, the more being manifests and shows itself. Consciousness removes the veil, but the veil needs to be put back, because the light is overwhelming. It can be embraced gradually as consciousness expands.

The act of creation takes us out of nothingness—it takes everything out from the invisible and gives it a form. It is important to understand that this "beginning" constantly renews itself. It is an eternal movement that allows the passage from time to eternity, to live in time but also in eternity.

So human beings, as part of this creation, have to make an effort to see the whole. This is the eschatological way, which means everything will be unveiled to the consciousness of everybody. The beauty of the human being is to see the universal consciousness. Our duty is to be conscious of this universal good in order to take part in this beauty.

> Once you withdraw from the world for a time, you come back and can share what has been understood.

Is it possible to change without needing to let go of something?

The central point of all of this is residing in the truth—to perceive what is the emptiness, to enter into the feeling of lack, and move from anguish and attachment to truth in our lives.

While in solitude we are in a deeper relationship with ourselves. This is essential because it gives us the true picture of the inner situation. Stay where you are, stay in the state of being here and now, that is how it begins. This process of descent into oneself unifies us with the process of being, with what we really are.

If we remain in the "mask" we are far away from ourselves, from being able to feel a new sense of being and belonging. We can do many spiritual exercises, but what we miss is the real breaking through. We have to enter in the courage of the truth.

Spirit is light, and truth searches light. Otherwise there is obscurity.

What is really possible for human beings in terms of opening to a different reality, a new way of being in the world?

We have to learn to live the eternity in time and taste things without possessiveness. There is no need to eliminate, deny, or dismiss anything. We have to find a centering point that can give us a right measure from things. Nothing is fundamental, and nothing is to be despised or rejected.

The more we attach, the more we identify with things. If we find our profound identity in the essence in that moment, we can taste everything. We can come to realize that there is nothing to throw away. Everything must be lived in the right way—without attachment. This is the beauty: tasting things with gratitude.

Attachment is produced by a psychic lack or unbalance. The more psyche goes towards the spirit the more attachments drop and what emerges is gratitude and a state of well-being. Then, certain things begin to stop being interesting. Things fall apart on their own, like leaves dropping from the tree. The sense of something lacking has an inscrutable depth. Inside us has been instilled the possibility to feel the lack, but also to fill the lack.

When you enter total emptiness, this lack can be filled with the celestial gift—without dependency. The spirit fills the lack in a peaceful way. But the feeling of lack is what begins everything.

Your practice of poustinia is focused on silence and solitude. What is the relationship between that and being engaged with the world as it relates to opening to a new way to live? Do we need to withdraw?

People ask me, what kind of rules do you have about this? I have only one: the balance between the inner and outer. It is not the isolation itself, going to a top of a mountain and withdrawing, but the state of being. It is living the experience, which means cultivating something inside, giving space inside to something else.

The moment we give space and time to this dimension of silence something opens, and we enter in a different relationship with life and our true essence—getting to know our shadows, our wounds, all of what we are. By seeing and listening to this silent sound, the physical sense becomes spiritualized.

Our essence is just a fragment of the divine essence. Like when we take water from a well—the bucket goes down into the water and takes a part of that whole. In the same way when we go inside of our essence we enter into the divine ocean and touch a part of that. What we understand there is mysterious and seemingly unspeakable. But because it becomes an experience, a sensitive experience, in the end it can be also spoken about.

The divine incarnates in the human and this can be shared. But it cannot be understood or manifested as just a thought. This is why we speak about poustinia "in the square" (*in life*). Once you withdraw from the world for a time, you come back and can share what has been understood, perceiving and listening to things differently. But unless someone practices in this moment of space and time, the danger is still to live constantly reacting to the world.

Like a plant that has very deep roots, once this practice in solitude is stable there is no need to withdraw all the time. So we always have to have two measures—within ourselves and outside—because this is where we will bring what we have found to use in the world, but not for us alone.

Compassion, mercy, all these qualities—they are like a universal way of perceiving and feeling. But they originate in the deep experience inside oneself, in silence and solitude where suffering rises. Not to escape the world, but to feel the world.

Is there anything else you'd like to share?

Love is the arrival point. Silence puts you in a state of listening, and through listening one enters a connection with the universal plan.

We have to see ourselves in this divine drawing. Death, evil, darkness—these are just possibilities in life. We do not need to be dominated by this thread. There is something beyond all of this, and we must raise our antenna to connect with what is above this— toward forces that are made of light.

But it is not easy to choose the spiritual way because of the domination of materialistic reasons. So we have to take responsibility and take a commitment to become instruments for something else. The spiritual life is something that begins for healing oneself, but in fact, it has universal consequences. It helps to bring light into the darkness.

Antonella Lumini has been pursuing a path of silence and solitude for over thirty years. After studying philosophy, she devoted herself to the study of the Bible and texts on Christian spirituality. She worked at the National Central Library of Florence dealing with ancient books. Antonella participates in spirituality meetings and leads meditation groups in Florence and other Italian cities. She has published *Inside the Silence* (2023) and *Deep Memory and Awakening* (2008), among other books.

Patrizia De Libero is a native of Rome, Italy, who has studied many spiritual traditions and embraced the Gurdjieff Work since her college days. She runs Kairos Pilgrimages, an organization connecting people to sacred places. Patrizia is a yoga teacher and certified death doula, and she runs the Everything Is Life school of conscious dying and living in North America.

Jon Pepper is a former musician, book designer, and entrepreneur who has almost fifty years of experience with meditation and spiritual pursuit. He is currently a trustee of the Gurdjieff Foundation of New York.

Uuriintuya Dagvasambuu is a contemporary master of the Mongol Zurag painting and is widely respected for her innovations in this style. She integrates traditional Mongolian and Buddhist motifs with contemporary themes, as she chronicles the lives of women and everyday, mundane life across the seasons in her post-nomadic homeland. Dagvasambuu graduated from the Institute of Fine Arts, Mongolian University of Arts and Culture. She lives and works in Ulaanbaatar.

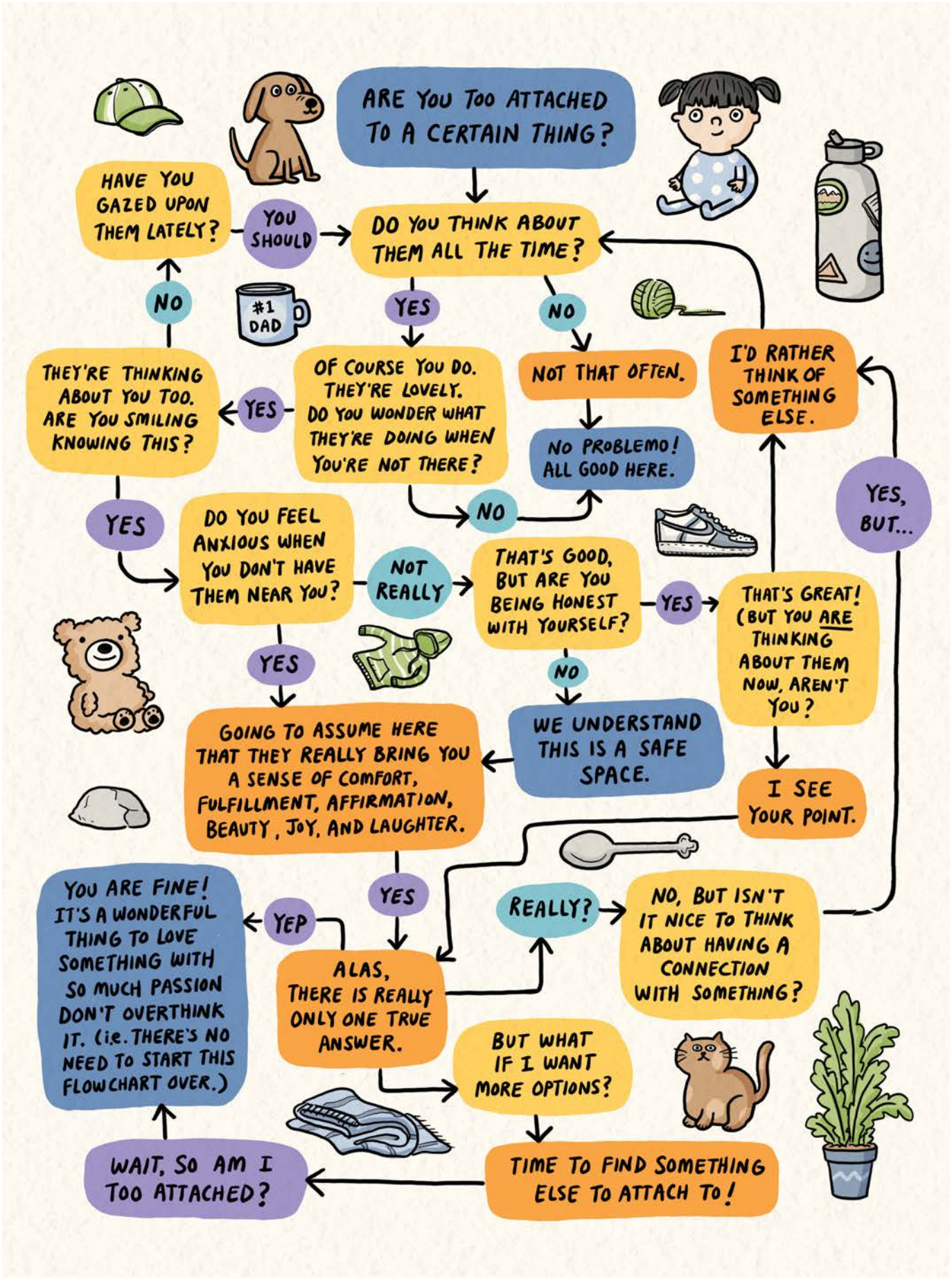

ARE YOU TOO ATTACHED TO A CERTAIN THING?
DO YOU THINK ABOUT THEM ALL THE TIME?
YES
NO
OF COURSE YOU DO. THEY'RE LOVELY. DO YOU WONDER WHAT THEY'RE DOING WHEN YOU'RE NOT THERE?
NOT THAT OFTEN.
NO PROBLEMO! ALL GOOD HERE.
NO
HAVE YOU GAZED UPON THEM LATELY?
YOU SHOULD
NO
THEY'RE THINKING ABOUT YOU TOO. ARE YOU SMILING KNOWING THIS?
YES
YES
DO YOU FEEL ANXIOUS WHEN YOU DON'T HAVE THEM NEAR YOU?
NOT REALLY
THAT'S GOOD, BUT ARE YOU BEING HONEST WITH YOURSELF?
YES
THAT'S GREAT! (BUT YOU ARE THINKING ABOUT THEM NOW, AREN'T YOU?
I'D RATHER THINK OF SOMETHING ELSE.
YES, BUT...
YES
NO
GOING TO ASSUME HERE THAT THEY REALLY BRING YOU A SENSE OF COMFORT, FULFILLMENT, AFFIRMATION, BEAUTY, JOY, AND LAUGHTER.
WE UNDERSTAND THIS IS A SAFE SPACE.
I SEE YOUR POINT.
YES
YEP
YOU ARE FINE! IT'S A WONDERFUL THING TO LOVE SOMETHING WITH SO MUCH PASSION DON'T OVERTHINK IT. (i.e. THERE'S NO NEED TO START THIS FLOWCHART OVER.)
ALAS, THERE IS REALLY ONLY ONE TRUE ANSWER.
REALLY?
NO, BUT ISN'T IT NICE TO THINK ABOUT HAVING A CONNECTION WITH SOMETHING?
BUT WHAT IF I WANT MORE OPTIONS?
WAIT, SO AM I TOO ATTACHED?
TIME TO FIND SOMETHING ELSE TO ATTACH TO!

ILLUSTRATION BY RUTH CHAN; OPPOSITE PAGE PHOTOGRAPH BY DAVID DE ARMAS

About the Museum

The Rubin Museum of Art

A GLOBAL MUSEUM DEDICATED TO SHARING HIMALAYAN ART WITH THE WORLD

The Rubin is a global museum dedicated to sharing Himalayan art with the world. Founded in 2004, the Rubin serves people internationally through a dynamic digital platform, participatory experiences, exhibitions, and partnerships. Inspired and informed by Himalayan art, the Rubin invites people to contemplate the human experience and deepen connections with the world around them in order to expand awareness, enhance well-being, and cultivate compassion. The Rubin advances scholarship through a series of educational initiatives, grants, long-term loans, and the stewardship of a collection of nearly 3,500 Himalayan art objects spanning 1,500 years of history—providing unprecedented access and resources to scholars, artists, and students across the globe. To learn more about the future of the Rubin visit rubinmuseum.org/transformation.

MUSEUM HOURS

Monday CLOSED
Tuesday CLOSED
Wednesday CLOSED
Thursday 11:00 AM–5:00 PM
Friday 11:00 AM–10:00 PM*
Saturday 11:00 AM–5:00 PM
Sunday 11:00 AM–5:00 PM

***Free admission every Friday from 6:00–10:00 PM**

Visit rubinmuseum.org for up-to-date open hours.

Ruth Chan (opposite) is an illustrator and author of comics and children's books. Her work has been featured in the *New York Times*, *Cup of Jo*, and with publishers HarperCollins, Macmillan, Simon & Schuster, and Abrams. Prior to illustrating full time, she spent a decade working with youth and families in underserved communities. She is a proud Canadian and lives and works in New York City. www.ohtruth.com

VISIT

150 West 17th Street New York, NY 10011
Between 6th and 7th Avenues

CONNECT WITH US

Explore the collection, discover inspiring stories, and receive the latest updates on our exhibitions and event listings!

- Visit us online at **rubinmuseum.org**
- Join our email list at **rubinmuseum.org/e-news**
- Listen to our podcasts: Mindfulness Meditation and AWAKEN
- Download the free Bloomberg Connects app to enjoy audio content about art from our collection
- Follow us on social media **@rubinmuseum**

Exhibitions

Through the lens of Himalayan art, the Rubin presents permanent and temporary exhibitions in New York City and beyond that explore our shared human experience and insightfully navigate the complexities of our world today.

Mandala Lab in London

IN NEW YORK CITY

Gateway to Himalayan Art
Through October 6, 2024
Learn about the rich artistic traditions of the region in this introduction to key figures, symbols, ideas, practices, materials, and techniques presented in artworks from the Museum's collection.

Mandala Lab
Through October 6, 2024
Consider the power of transforming complex emotions in this interactive space for social, emotional, and ethical learning, featuring five thought-provoking installations inspired by a Tibetan Buddhist mandala.

Masterworks: A Journey through Himalayan Art
Through October 6, 2024
Journey across geography and more than a thousand years of history, tracing artistically and historically significant works from the Rubin's collection as well as new acquisitions and gifts.

The Tibetan Buddhist Shrine Room
Through October 6, 2024
Step into the Shrine Room for a moment of contemplation, beauty, or wonder. A focal point of the Rubin and a visitor favorite, this immersive installation features art from the collection and is inspired by traditional shrines.

Reimagine: Himalayan Art Now
March 15–October 6, 2024
Celebrate what Himalayan art means now with a Museum-wide exhibition featuring artworks by over thirty contemporary artists, many from the Himalayan region and diaspora and others inspired by Himalayan art. Discover new commissions and recent works in a wide range of media juxtaposed with objects from the Rubin's collection, inviting new ways of encountering traditional Himalayan art.

TRAVELING EXHIBITIONS

Gateway to Himalayan Art
Modeled after the New York City exhibition of the same name, this nationally traveling exhibition to university galleries and museums is part of the Rubin's Project Himalayan Art. It travels to the Harn Museum of Art at the University of Florida (February 13–July 28, 2024) followed by the Frank Museum of Art at Otterbein University, Ohio (fall 2024).

Mandala Lab
The traveling version of the Mandala Lab installation in New York City brings the five interactive experiences to the public realm for free. It debuted in Bilbao, Spain, in 2022, traveled to London in 2023, and continues its European tour in 2024.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY ED REEVE (THIS PAGE) AND FILIP WOLAK (OPPOSITE PAGE)

Programs

The Rubin presents an array of in-person and online thematic public programs, from dialogues on mind science to art-making workshops for families, that dive deeper into art and ideas from the Himalayas.

ADULT & FAMILY PROGRAMS

K2 Friday Nights
Free Museum admission, Fridays, 6:00–10:00 PM
Explore the galleries for free, join a 7:15 PM exhibition tour, and hang out in Café Serai, which transforms into the K2 Lounge with a special drink menu and DJ set.

Talks and Workshops
Attend a variety of talks and workshops hosted in the Rubin's theater, as well as interactive workshops in the galleries. Programs include **Mindfulness Meditation**, a weekly guided meditation session inspired by a work of art in the collection; **Himalayan Heritage**, a recurring event that explores the cultures, art, history, and sacred traditions of the Himalayan region; and more.

Family Sundays
Sundays, 1:00–3:00 PM, in the Mandala Lab
Join us for an afternoon of art-making and activities both kids and grown-ups will enjoy. Recommended for ages 3 and older with accompanying adults.

PODCASTS

Available on Apple Podcasts, Spotify, or wherever you listen to podcasts.

Mindfulness Meditation Podcast
This series hosted by the Rubin's Tashi Chödrön is a recording of the weekly in-person guided meditation sessions, each inspired by an object in the collection.

AWAKEN Season 4
Launches in fall 2024
Explore the dynamic path to enlightenment and what it means to "wake up" with personal stories from guests who share how they've experienced a shift in their awareness, and as a result, their perspective on life.

ACCESSIBILITY PROGRAMS

Memory Connections
Second Thursday of the month, 11:00 AM–12:00 PM
In this free online program for people living with dementia and their caregivers, trained teaching artists and special performers facilitate an experience designed to promote engagement between participants and the art and cultures of the Himalayan region.

Empowering Caregivers
Third Thursday of the month, 11:30 AM–12:30 PM
This free program aims to build a community of caregivers through art and connection. Guided by art in the collection, Rubin docents lead close-looking and creative exercises as well as lively discussion.

SCHOOL PROGRAMS

Classroom teachers can incorporate these educational programs into their school curricula: **K–12 Guided Tours** led by trained Museum educators; **K–12 Workshops** that integrate Social, Emotional, and Ethical (SEE) Learning® principles; and **Math and Mandalas**, which explores the mandala, a symbol of the universe, through the lens of mathematics. Discover more and book online at **rubinmuseum.org/education/k-12-students**

All programs subject to change. For current listings, visit rubinmuseum.org/events

Experience More

In addition to our exhibitions and programs, discover unique items from our shop, or make the Rubin the lively venue for your next private event.

The Shop
Take a memory of the Museum home with you or give a gift from the Rubin! The shop's selection of jewelry, textiles, books, and other treasures includes an array of unique items, many unavailable anywhere else. All proceeds from the shop support the Rubin Museum of Art, and items can be purchased in store or online. Members receive a 10% discount on all purchases.
shop.rubinmuseum.org

Lady Ceramic Vase

Private Events and Rentals
Whether you're hosting an office party or family gathering, we'll guide you through the process of planning a fabulous event at the Rubin Museum complete with after-hours gallery access and special drink menus. Learn more at **rubinmuseum.org/space-rentals**

Scholarship

The Rubin is a platform for advancing knowledge and a broader understanding of Himalayan art and cultures globally.

PROJECT HIMALAYAN ART

This three-part initiative is the Museum's most ambitious contribution to and investment in the field of Himalayan art. Project Himalayan Art provides students, educators, artists, and lifelong learners introductory resources for learning about and teaching Himalayan art, with an emphasis on cross-cultural exchange.

Publication
Himalayan Art in 108 Objects offers an accessible introduction to Himalayan art as illuminated by a selection of objects from the Neolithic era to today. Essays by seventy-two international scholars from different fields contextualize the art within religious, social, literary, and material culture.

Traveling Exhibition
Gateway to Himalayan Art is an introduction to the art and cultures of the greater Himalayan region featuring artworks from the Rubin Museum's collection. The nationally traveling exhibition presents the fundamental visual language and meanings of Himalayan art, outlines the materials and techniques used to create such works, and highlights the living practices and intentions behind these objects. It foregrounds voices from Himalayan communities, including artists, practitioners, and teachers.

Digital Platform
Project Himalayan Art is an online hub for the study of Himalayan art. It combines materials from the exhibition and publication with multimedia content, such as videos, 360-degree object views, interactive maps, and geography-based narratives, as well as a glossary and teaching resources.

Explore Project Himalayan Art at **rubinmuseum.org/projecthimalayanart**

You Make It Possible

The Rubin Museum is only as strong as our supporters. You help us create a space for learning, contemplation, inspiration, community, and art. Join us!

Join us with generosity as we celebrate the Rubin Museum's twentieth anniversary. With your support, we can cultivate learning, promote understanding, and inspire personal connections to the ideas, cultures, and art of the Himalayan region for our public—locally, nationally, and internationally. Visit **rubinmuseum.org/support** to learn more.

Become a member or give the gift of membership
Member support is vital. In thanks for joining our community, you gain behind-the-scenes access, invitations to exclusive previews and tours, free admission to Mindfulness Meditation, unlimited entry to the galleries, *Spiral* magazine mailed to your home, and more.

Make a donation
Your support helps make art and timeless wisdom come alive. Consider making a fully tax-deductible donation to our Annual Fund, participating in your employer's matching gift program, and supporting future generations with a Legacy Gift.

Give a major gift
Align your philanthropic passions with generous support for the Museum's general operations, multiyear initiatives, digital content and learning resources, and programs to assist artists and scholars, including our new grants program. Gifts of $5,000 and above receive public recognition.

Support with foundation and corporate giving
We invite connections to your philanthropic organizations. Foundation Giving is essential for major initiatives, traveling exhibitions, digital and in-person programs, and K–12 school learning and teacher resources. Corporate Sponsorship, starting at $10,000, offers your company branding recognition. Corporate Membership, beginning at $5,000, fosters a deeper connection between your company and the Rubin, and includes special perks.

PHOTOGRAPH BY KJ BOWEN

Spiral

A magazine at the intersection of art, science, and Himalayan cultures.

Spiral asks big questions at the center of our shared human experience: life and death, connection to one another and our world, identity, states of consciousness, the cosmos, and the nature of existence. Inspired by Buddhist thinking and ideas on non-attachment, the **Reframe** issue explores how releasing our attachments to stories, beliefs, and identities that no longer serve us creates new ways of thinking, seeing, and being, helping us to reframe our perspective.

Visit *Spiral* online in fall 2024 for brand new essays, interviews, art, animation, and more from artists featured in *Reimagine: Himalayan Art Now,* including Jupiter Pradhan, Kabi Raj Lama in collaboration with Dr. Sujaya Neupane, Kunsang Kyirong, Meena Kayastha, Shraddha Shrestha, Shushank Shretha, Tenzin Lhamo, and Tenzin Mingyur Paldron, as well as contributions from curators such as Beatriz Cifuentes, Roshan Mishra, Michelle Bennett Simorella, and Sangeeta Thapa.

ART IN YOUR INBOX

Sign up for the Rubin email newsletter at **rubinmuseum.org/e-news** and discover more about Himalayan art and its insights with engaging content in your inbox like podcasts, videos, articles, and more.

Read *Spiral* online at **rubinmuseum.org/spiral**

Shushank Shrestha (b. 1993, Kathmandu, Nepal; lives and works in Marion, MA); *Male Guardian Lion Dog* (one of a pair from *Two Guardian Lion Dogs*); 2023; ceramic, in-glaze lustre; courtesy of the artist

THE RUBIN MUSEUM OF ART
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20 YEARS